

THE STRANGERS' WEDDING



W. L. GEORGE



THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

GIFT OF

Richard Petrie



THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

BY W. L. GEORGE

THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

THE SECOND BLOOMING

A BED OF ROSES

THE CITY OF LIGHT

UNTIL THE DAY BREAK

THE MAKING OF AN ENGLISHMAN

OLGA NAZIMOV

WOMAN AND TO-MORROW

DRAMATIC ACTUALITIES

ANATOLE FRANCE

THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

THE COMEDY OF A ROMANTIC

BY

W. L. GEORGE

Author of "The Second Blooming," etc.



BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
1916

Copyright, 1916,
BY W. L. GEORGE.

*Copyright in Great Britain, Ireland and British Colonies and
in all countries under the Convention by W. L. George.*

All rights reserved

Published, January, 1916
Reprinted, January, 1916
February, 1916

Printers
S. J. PARKHILL & CO., BOSTON, U.S.A.

PR

6013

G292

Gratefully *acknowledging that I owe him
the original idea on which this novel is based,
and hoping that he will overlook the many
places where my writing has fallen short of
his intention, I feel pleasure in dedicating this
book to*

A. W. ROGERS

905385

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

PART THE FIRST

LEAVES OF OAK

A sore-hipped hippopotamus, greatly flustered,
Was grumbling at his poultice made of custard:
"Can't you put upon my hip
Something better than this flip?"
So they put upon his hip a pot o' mustard.

(Limericks of the Edwardo-Georgian
transition period).

THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

CHAPTER THE FIRST

“OUT OF THE EVERYWHERE . . .”

I

THROUGH the railings of Green Park he could see, far away in the south, the tower of Westminster Cathedral pointing as a gigantic finger towards Heaven. Or towards nothing, thought Huncote. Who could say? The brick spear pleased him, its air of indication and, more ambitious, its Atlas boast of bearing upon a single pillar paradise, while rooted in hell. The day indeed was theological; not one of those London days when the skies seem to pour mud and the fear of death transmutes itself into a fear that one may never die, nor yet one of those days when all men see, as Blake, a host of angels in a flaming sky. It was a grey and undefined October day of doubt, of trees still clad but shabbily, of soft air still warm, yet hinting that its child might be cold. No blustering wind, but a world undefined, as if arrested, hesitating, upon the brink of an inevitable plunge into some other world.

For a little while Huncote amused himself with a speculation that was a habit rather than an amusement. He was not interested in the hereafter; at Oxford he had had his religious fit as other men have their drinking fit, or womanise or row. He had been particular about vestments and their proper colours, then veered

4 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

towards Luther, and even frequented a chapel with a corrugated iron roof. He had read number 90 of "Tracts for the Times", and Haeckel on the top. Out of chaos had come no order, but rather a feeling, half-optimistic, half-sceptical, that in the end heavenly mercy or revenge could take the hindmost. He was a sort of insured agnostic. That morning he found it impossible even to admit anything immaterial, to reconcile with roaring Piccadilly behind him that giant finger pointing to the sky. And more proximate objects made him into a clearer materialist. For it was not so cold yet that, upon the meadow alongside the Ritz that is like a badly laid green carpet, the forgotten tramps of London could not lie. There they were, each apart from his fellow, maintaining the last dignity of the poor: keeping himself to himself. Things half-asleep upon the benches, with effaced arms and legs, heads sunken into chests as if the hats were too heavy for tired necks; and, scattered all about the meadow, as upon a battle-field the slain, others screwed up for warmth and limbless, or fallen upon their backs with upward-pointing knees; or on their sides with an outthrown arm and straggling fingers clutching at nothing.

Huncote looked at them for a long time: "The pageant of the people," he told himself, "there's some of it."

For a moment he hated them, was disgusted as he thought of those bodies, meagre, unfed, unwashed, evil-smelling, temples of beastly little minds, merely lustful and mainly revengeful unless, which was still worse, those minds were just brought down to brute-level. But in a second the mood passed and, as Huncote gazed through the railings which he held with both hands, he was seized with pity and a sort of self-reproach. For what were they doing, these hands, in such a world,—in the brand-new reindeer gloves which he had bought across the road? Those long, slim fingers in the beauti-

ful, soft grey skin,—how ineffectual they looked! He hated them in that moment because he knew that those fingers shrank, as if by instinct, from the idea of touching that evil upon the grass which after all was still man. And he knew that a time must come when he must touch it, and not even with half-guinea gloves but with bare, shrinking hands. “Only like that,” he thought, “can I justify myself; only by practising nobility can I avoid being ignoble in my own luxurious way.”

He sighed. It would have been much nicer not to have had a conscience, or a sense of duty, or an impulse of pity, or rot of that sort, and just to have been a blood or something simple. Still, there it was! Before he could go any farther into his meditation, a hand had smacked him upon the shoulder.

“Hallo! Huncote! What are you staring at? Isn’t it a bit early to mark down Eve in the Garden of Eden?”

Huncote turned to look at the speaker, only half understanding him.

“Hallo! Piggy!” he said. “What are you doing here?”

“I’m going to lunch,” said Piggy, otherwise Gorsley, “which strikes me as being more filling to the body than the meditation with which you are evidently satisfying your soul.”

Huncote smiled. “D’you know, Piggy, that’s not quite idiotic. I suppose I was satisfying my soul in a sort of way.”

“And has it occurred to you,” said Gorsley, “that spiritual exaltation sometimes leads to appetite—that monks are good trenchermen—and that the highest flights of the spirit are limited by the weakness of the flesh?” He grinned comically at his own incipient paunch. “Though I may not look it, O Cardinal Quixote, I too have been the home of Seven Devils, and

6 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

have been visited of all of them. The worst of them, I confess, by which I mean the most pleasing, is the demon of greediness. In short, I am wasting valuable minutes which I intended to pass at the club over the way where I now crave your presence."

"Thanks awfully," said Huncote, "since you have dragged me back to the world. You really are a swine, Piggy, you know."

"What else would you expect from a man with so elegant a 'nickname'?" asked Gorsley comfortably. "Funny thing," he went on as they crossed the road, still talking busily as they dodged among the motor-buses, "I don't mind being called 'Piggy.' Always was called something of the sort. I was 'Fatty' in the nursery, and 'Tubby' at Marlborough, and at Gabs it was 'Piggy.' Can't get away from lard somehow! Still, I'm nearing the end, I think."

"How's that?" asked Huncote, as they took off their overcoats in the club lobby.

"Well," said Gorsley, "I should say that in a few years no more spermacetian suggestions will be made about me; the climate of India with luck will see to that. In five years, Huncote, you won't know me; I shall be as thin as a lath, as they say in the halfpenny papers, and yellow as a guinea, in the eloquent phrase of Thackeray, and long as a day without bread, to quote our gay neighbours across the Channel. I shall be a complete Indian civilian, with one little body and one large liver. It'll be a change, anyhow."

The first part of lunch was entirely occupied by Gorsley's anticipations and not very evident fears of the examination for the Indian Civil he would have to stand in another fourteen months. He was a rather noisy, bounding young man, extremely sure of himself and prepared to play football with the world; at Oxford he had sat on most committees and had enlivened them with drifting eloquence. He was fond of beer and

champagne, of caviare, boiled mutton, pretty townees, and of the girls who came up to Oxford for Eights: he could circulate the cups at tea parties, and correctly address the daughter of a duke who had married a commoner later raised to the peerage and who ultimately ended as a dowager. Also he was amazingly like a pig, with eyes that appeared only from time to time as the ray from a lighthouse; his chubby mouth and his large nose suggested an amiable potato. Falstaff as cherub! One did not overlook Gorsley; though he had just come down from Oxford, even the club waiters respected him.

Towards the end of lunch Gorsley, who so far had with assumed modesty explained why he had not the ghost of a chance of a really good job, suddenly swerved towards the affairs of his friend.

"What about you?" he asked suddenly. "What have you got in your eye?" Then, before Huncote could reply: "D'you know, I used to think — you being a brainy sort of chap and all that — you might have a chance of a fellowship."

"Not likely. I floated frightfully in Schools. Besides, I don't want to be a don."

"Well!" said Gorsley, with large generosity.

"Yes, I know," said Huncote. "I have talked of becoming a don; every other freshman talks of that, but it isn't in my line. Oxford's too damp, for one thing; the home of neuritis; how the dons manage to look so dry in an atmosphere like that, I don't know."

"Celibacy, my dear fellow," boomed Gorsley. "Celibacy, whether married or not." And for a while he dilated, a little to Huncote's discomfort, upon the temperature of the passions of various fellows of Gabriel. But Gorsley was inquisitive; he had been to so many tea parties, made so many enquiries, known the outside of so many people and the inside of so few, cared so little about what they felt and wanted so much to know what they did, that Huncote stimulated him to

8 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

enquiry. Gorsley had often wondered about Huncote, as did a good many other people at Oxford. He had always thought that this long, lanky person, with the straight brows and the close-set, deep-grey eyes, was bound to do something queer. But what? "I don't say you were born to be a don," he replied in injured tones; "there are loads of other things. I say, let's have coffee in the smoking-room."

The passage into the smoking-room did not deflect Gorsley from his quest. As soon as they sat down he began again.

"But what are you going to do?" he asked. "Thought of anything?"

"I s'pose I have," said Huncote guardedly. He threw at the amiable Piggy a look almost hostile. It was characteristic of him that he disliked people laying rough hands upon his life. He was aloof; like men whose interior life is vivid, he tended to protect himself from the outside. He had done all the usual things at Oxford, but almost as if they were part of the curriculum. He was rather an old young man, though but twenty-three. He hated being hustled like this. But Gorsley did not notice, and blissfully continued to roll over Huncote's protesting little phrases.

"One's got to settle what one's going to do, you know. It doesn't do to stroll about London as if it was the High. One's got to do something. Didn't realise it myself a year or two ago," he added charitably.

"Oh, yes you did," said Huncote, rather vicious.

"Only in a sort of way. Of course I knew I had to make a living and all that — but that's not the question; even a man who hasn't got to make a living — well, hang it all, it's pretty dull if you don't do anything. I thought you were going to be a parson one time?"

"I did think about it," said Huncote, "but it didn't last long. It isn't comfortable in the Church when you don't believe in anything."

“It can be done,” said Gorsley. “Why, think of all the — of all those French ecclesiastics in the seventeenth and eighteenth century; they didn’t swallow it, did they?”

“No,” said Huncote, “I suppose they didn’t. But then, in the seventeenth century it was not exactly religion, was it? It was politics rather.”

“Politics,” said Gorsley, his eyes more visible this time than they had been the last hour. “What about Parliament? Ever thought of standing for Parliament?”

“Yes,” said Huncote reluctantly, “I do think of it now and then.”

“Tell you what,” said Gorsley, “if you’re really thinking of it, you go in with the Tories. The Liberals have got all the young men, and you know the Tory push at the Union — well, talk of purulent toads! They are It. A brainy man like you’ll win hands down. Chancellor of the Exchequer at forty-five. It’s a sure thing.”

Huncote began to laugh. “Piggy,” he said, “I’d tell you again you’re a swine, only you don’t mind. Don’t you know I’m a Liberal?”

“Oh, that’s all right,” said Gorsley. “Political opinions are fluid; and some of us don’t attach much importance to them, we officials for instance,” he added, with a wink.

Huncote laughed again. It was no use,—one could not be angry with Piggy even if he were a nuisance, always digging at you to know what you were doing, and looking at the photographs of your female friends in your rooms, and reading the cards stuck in your mirror. Oh, at it again.

“A man who can wait,” he said, “can still make a career at the Bar. He can mix it in with politics and that’s quite a pie.” His tone grew pitying. “You might try the Home Civil. Though it’d have been better to start from Cambridge. Only one can’t go to

10 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

Cambridge." He laughed. "You know: Loving the earth, God made heaven; generous, he made Oxford; resentful, he made hell; then he made Cambridge."

Huncote did not laugh, and Gorsley for a moment gazed at him reflectively, felt rather sorry for him. He was the sort of young man who, because he was always doing something himself, thought that everybody else ought always to be doing something; in the course of an excellent education he had had to dabble with philosophy, and he would have understood what you meant if you told him that nothing was something, only he could not apply that to life. Gorsley's mind was full of words beginning with capitals: Work, Career, Success; and there were two words which his mind printed in capitals drawn from the largest font: GETTING ON. He was very irritated by Roger Huncote who seemed so obstinately set on not doing this undefined but essential something, who was just religious enough to be annoying, though not religious enough to run for bishop; he "didn't mind" the Bar, and at the same time had political opinions rigid enough to unfit him for politics. Also he suspected that Roger Huncote was not impressed by the Indian Civil. For a moment he grew acid.

"Lord! I don't know what's going to become of you. It wasn't for nothing they called you 'Cardinal Quixote.'"

"I don't know why they called me that," said Huncote. "There's something mystic and militant and romantic about it, and when I reflect that I'm an amiable agnostic whose militancy consists in lying in bed and whose impulse towards romance has not manifested itself even at Buol's, I can't understand it. Give me up, Piggy; it's no good, you'll never make a man of me."

Gorsley flung him a rather disconsolate glance.

"I don't know, Huncote, you're a queer fish!"

II

It was not the first time in his life that Roger Huncote had been called a queer fish. There was a queer fishiness about him in the nursery where he developed so early a taste for knocking out melodies on a tumbler that Mrs. Huncote specially looked up the early lives of great musicians and related her son with Mozart. Already then she reflected that he was not the ordinary kind of boy. Yet he seemed to grow up very much the ordinary kind of boy. He did all the things that ordinary boys do, from hating rice-pudding to breaking windows, but there always seemed to lurk at the back of these purely human impulses a detachment, as if he were thinking of something else. At Winchester he played cricket, looking, while he fielded, as if he were composing an elegy; yet when he had to try his hand at Greek hexameters, Roger Huncote treated the exercise as if with every line the longing grew in him to return to a well-beloved novelette, “Gorgando the Sanguinary,” which, with various more respectable works of Marryat, he kept in his desk. He had a quality of independence less in the things he did, for he seldom took the lead in anything, than in the things he did not. He was not a boy to be swayed by fashions; while even rigid Elspeth, his elder sister, had to wear smallish hats when hats were small, Huncote wore brown boots to the shade of which his form objected: almost a vocation for Christian martyrdom. It was Huncote who, in his first term, found out that none but freshers gave cabmen two shillings for the drive from the station, and ventured to offer them one-and-six. And yet all this did not resolve itself in a distinct personality.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

“ . . . INTO HERE ”

I

HUNCOTE paused for a moment just outside Paddington Station. In that minute the station and Praed Street did not seem ugly to him. Indeed it is a question whether to any man who has lived in Oxford, Paddington and Praed Street can ever lose all their romance, for they are the hyphen between the contemplative life and the active; they are the places where are breathed sighs of relief because Oxford is left behind, or of delight because London is shaken off. They are as the bed in Richepin's poem, where all things begin, where all things end. That morning for Huncote things were again beginning; he had almost fled Oxford when term ended, as if the aftermath of that evening, when Swinburne's verse flowed like honey through the bull of Bashan's brazen trump, had left in him a sweet and tainted memory. Through Easter term, Oxford had snuggled by him, intolerable, like a sort of Ninon de l'Enclos still desirable at eighty — but eighty! Those sleepy waters and gardens were growing, not orchids, but Shakespeare flowers. Mustiness mixed with rowdiness: it had all felt either too mellow or too crude. He had growing pains, and the most horrible kind of growing pains, for here he was afflicted with them inside an iron cage.

And so he had not, as he vaguely felt he ought, loaded his luggage upon a taxi and driven across to Euston where he would dutifully take the train for St. Olaves to stay at his mother's house. As he stood blinking in

the spun-gold light of the London sun, observing as old friends a tobacconist opposite who, he remembered, always hung his shop with dark blue on boat-race day, and a flower shop next to Praed Street Station, where a girl was rather pretty, he was conscious of unrest: for Huncote owned a conscience, and the world had not yet trained it into docility. But his mother and Flora had come up for Eights, and he had grown so appallingly tired of the faded prettiness of the one and the over-bright prettiness of the other, so tired of Mrs. Huncote and of her offensive remarks about boys. It made him shrink when she said “ boys ”, because the freshmen might hear her. And he was so tired of explaining that a dean was not necessarily an ecclesiastic, of meeting Flora’s curiosities as to what a blood or a binge was. Flora had flirted, and her mother had worn a nice smile from the beginning to the end. They were charming in their way, only they were not passionate monks, and Oxford had no use for them; Huncote was not sure that the presence of any woman in Oxford was not sacrilegious. So he drew back from the idea of vacuous days up there; even the tonic of his elder sister Elspeth’s hardness would not make the thing tolerable just then. Later on, in August, it would be all right, when the Oxford paint, so fresh on him now, had dried a little.

“ No,” he thought aloud, “ I’ll stay.”

And as he thought, having conceded so much to Dionysus, he felt relieved, like a murderer who looks upon his victim on the ground and thinks, with a sigh of relief: “ Well, anyhow, that’s over.”

It had been a short struggle, for indeed, as he quickly stepped through Spring Street, the day was Dionysian. There was languor and exuberance in the streets, already warm with early sun. London was like a very young courtesan who still enjoys her trade, whose tree jewellery is still fresh and roses but in bud. From

14 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

the pavement rose dust that the lazy warm breeze carried a very little way up and scented with those exquisite London smells of horses, petrol, tanyard and brewery, beautiful, working smells, smells of art, not obvious smells of nature. As he drew nearer to the Park, the motorcars that passed him, perhaps because the air was light, seemed faster, more whizzing than usual, their highly polished fittings more like lightnings. Yet, strangely enough, as if all things that day were exaggerated, just as the motorcars seemed swifter, the brewer's van, with the two big Flemish horses still begauded with the rosettes they had just earned at Carthorse Parade, seemed slower. The driver upon his high seat sat back, the reins lay in his languid large hands. And it passed with an echoing, crooning rumble. As he went, Huncote was violently conscious of strain and slackness in the early London summer. Two women came towards him, women in tweeds, one of them summed up in a pince-nez; women with brick-red in their cheeks and sand in their hair, and in their ill-gloved hands and clumsy feet the disgrace of womanhood. As he passed them he thrilled with hatred, as if he could not bear that anything should be ugly in the midst of pageantry. He was young, he was unjust, for he had not related his anger with that second of joy as he passed a girl who went with quick steps about her business, upon whose red hair, high-piled, the sun laid a sheen that made of it a copper helmet. As he passed he flung her a sidelong look, and never before had he seen such humid blue eyes, and lips red and rolled back. Her beauty hurt him as the ugliness had hurt him. He was so young as to be happy in ignorance, and not to understand just then that both were signs of London's fever which would dwindle and then fall as the golden days turned into grey, then rise again when from the grey came gold, as it was in the beginning and would ever be.

As he went into Kensington Gardens he could not be philosophic; he could only feel. No past and no future here, but a present almost intolerable because too enfolding. London in its sober, secret riot. It seemed a very long walk across the Gardens to Knightsbridge where are red sentries, and through the prance of Piccadilly to the restaurant where he had a man to meet. He swore at himself because he had a man to meet, and for a moment saw Oxford as it was, because he, like other undergraduates, always had a man to meet (and seldom a woman), a tea party to go to, a music hall to visit, and so on: Oxford on the loose or rather Oxford on the lead. It was hateful because his eyes were still filled with the memory of the amber and golden beads of the calceolaria, and the spears of the snapdragon laden with garnet bells. He would have liked not to roll in the spangled meadows, but rather to hang for a very long time over the parapet of the Serpentine bridge and to look at the cunning woods that are like a Hampshire hanger towards the pale-blue East that smiles and broods above Park Lane. But he had a conscience, and though it had not been so difficult to break with an obligation, a visit to St. Olaves, it was impossible to break with a promise; he had to meet Ditton at lunch.

Ditton too had that morning felt the influence of Dionysus, but the god had not made him dreamy. Rather had he poured into his veins an urgency to do something, anything, a mere restlessness, but still it was an energy and much greater than Huncote's intoxicated languor, an energy which enabled him to force out of his friend another promise: that he would dine with him that night and go to a music hall. Huncote promised because he could think of no way of escape. He made a mental reservation, told himself that he would not go but would send a telegram at the last minute. Yet at the same time he knew that he would go because even if Ditton did talk of Gabs, still here

they were, and it was London, and soon it would be night. At what altar better sacrifice than at that of the European promenade?

II

Huncote knew without having phrased it that Ditton came to town to paint it red, as Ditton put it. He had liked the fellow ever since he had carefully made himself up to look like the warden of St. Saviour's, whom he closely resembled, and boldly gone into the big draper's in the Corn and ordered a lady's chemise, together with curling pins and other accessories, to be sent to his rooms before seven o'clock. There was not an undergraduate who did not know the story, but a coalition of all the authorities in Oxford failed to discover the culprit. Ditton said he did not believe the authorities had tried very hard, for he suspected that after a moment of annoyance the warden began to enjoy the vague reputation of dreadful doggishness which he acquired in the whole town. There was in Ditton's eye a sort of permanent wink and so, while he waited in the lobby of the Trocadero, Huncote felt that he might dispel listlessness. But as almost at once the swing-doors opened, he drew back and became a little stiff. Ditton had not played fair with him. Really he should not have done it without asking him, for here he was with Moss and Wray, two of the worst, two of the very worst, who belonged to a set at Gabs that he never had anything to do with. Huncote came forward and shook hands rather coldly. But it was no use being cold; evidently Wray and Moss, who thought him intolerably superior, were willing to make allowances for him. Also, as they went down the stairs, Huncote watched the movement of Wray's blazing red head and decided that he was already drunk.

He was annoyed. It was all very well Ditton mak-

ing up a party, but everybody knew that Wray was always a bit drunk. As they shed their coats he watched angrily the behaviour of the man who was bound to disgrace them in the course of the evening. The object of his anger smiled at him with perfect satisfaction, for Lord Alastair Fitzmaurice Wray was seldom in the mood to dislike anybody much; in his present condition he was beyond all hatreds. And it was hard to dislike him, for he was extraordinarily handsome, an inch or so over six feet in height, and one could not quarrel with the beaming stupidity which radiated from his innocent blue eyes, from the mouth which had at the age of four caused him to be painted as a cupid.

“ Glad to see you,” he remarked vaguely to Huncote. Then, as they passed in: “ Feller like you gives tone to a party, that’s what I say.” He grew more intent: “ What I say is a feller like you gives tone to a party; see what I mean ? ”

“ Oh, yes, I see what you mean,” said Huncote uneasily, trying to humour him.

Ditton was ordering the dinner in collaboration with Moss, who was a judge of wines, so Lord Alastair persisted.

“ What you want in a party is tone,” he said, “ l — l — liter tone. A man like you gives tone to a party, see what I mean ? ”

“ Yes, I see what you mean,” said Huncote, rather frigid.

“ Awfully clever of you,” remarked Lord Alastair, “ lots of people don’t know what I mean when I’m blind. At least I’m not blind, quite all right, ain’t I, Mossy ? ”

The little dark Jew flung him a humorous glance of contempt.

“ You’re drunk as a lord,” he said, “ and most suitable. No, Dutton, don’t have Rudesheimer to start on.

18 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

Let me look at the list. Soda water for Alastair and nothing else."

The young man had not heard his sentence to sobriety, for he was convulsed with merriment over Moss's joke.

"Drunk as a lord! Ever heard anything so funny?" He violently smacked Huncote's thigh. "Ever heard anything so funny?" Then, with sudden seriousness, leaning over and seizing Moss by the sleeve, he remarked: "Mossy, you're damn clever!"

Moss looked at him with that affectionate, half-contemptuous air. This big, handsome fool of an English aristocrat was the only creature that Moss had ever loved. To him Wray was like a very large puppy who could understand a certain amount of what one meant, who played fine, rough games with one, like tugging at a piece of rope, games suited to his strength and intelligence. Half the men who knew Moss summed him up as a dirty little black beast with the foulest mouth and mind in Oxford; he was generally on the make and opened a banking account when at school; they respected him because of his knowledge of the world, that is to say of the rotten end of it, but they hated him for the same reason. And they made no allowances for that side of him so strong, as it is in many of his people, his passion for the beautiful. They knew that in his rooms was a large collection of Benvenuto Cellini gold-work and of Renaissance enamels. Some of the men who happened to be musical forgave him a good deal because now and then they slunk into his rooms in the evening, where he took no notice of them and played Bach fugues on the piano with amazing dexterity. Nobody understood that it was Wray's beauty, his immense, fine-moulded limbs, and that sharp-angled, thick crop of red hair that filled the æsthetic Jew's soul with endless delights.

The dinner had progressed beyond the soup before

the conversation became at all active, for they were young, all of them, and therefore hungry at half-past seven. But when it began, inevitably enough it was of Oxford, as if the undergraduates carried away with them an environment which they must get rid of before they plunged into London.

Moss criticised the “ bumper ” he had attended. It had not been, he thought, well done; the wines had been ill-selected and ill-ordered by a host who came from a class that had neither the traditions of country gentlemen nor the instincts of wine-merchants. “ And you’d never believe it,” he added, looking about him for sympathy, “ they had roast fowl — actually roast fowl ! ” He giggled. “ I thought that sort of people worshipped saddle of mutton.”

Huncote and Ditton laughed, feeling it their duty, for they were not quite sure that there was anything wrong with saddle of mutton, so usual in their own homes. Moss’s eyes twinkled: he was clever enough to know the cause of their forced laughter, and he had a keen ironic pleasure in feeling superior to the people who lived beyond that invisible pale where his own folk were prisoned. And so there was a little cleavage of silence until Ditton began to tell them the story of the latest rag. As usual Areley had been the victim.

“ That chap, Areley,” said Ditton, “ he’s asking for it. What the freshers will do without him when he goes down, Lord only knows.”

“ Who’s Areley ? ” asked Huncote.

“ Oh,” said Ditton, “ he’s the — he digs in St. Olds; of course you might know him but, being at the House, a man gets lost in that great barn of a place. Don’t you remember ? He’s the man we put the placard on.”

A splutter of merriment went up from the other two, and suddenly Huncote laughed too as he remembered Areley, the tall, absent-minded, goggle-eyed person who had gone the whole length of the High with a large

20 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

placard pinned on his gown, marked: "Strike but hear!"

"I think it's rather a shame," said Huncote, at last.

"Not a bit of it," said Moss, "we've all got our function in the world; Areley's the comic relief. Isn't that true, Ditton?"

"Rather."

"But I haven't told you what we did to him the other day. He was having one of his highly superior little parties, just a select few, you know, the best people—all that; third year men only. They had met together for a quiet dinner in a private room at the Mitre. Georgian silver, caviare; lemonade, or champagne to suit one's principles. The whole thing to be followed by a really high-toned debate on 'The Young Novelists of England and What They Will Do For Our Country.'"

"Well, what's the rag?" asked Huncote.

"This chap, Areley," Ditton explained, "he does the thing properly, you know. Somebody found out through his landlady's daughter where he kept his invitation cards. You mayn't believe it, but he's got engraved cards which he sends out for his extra specials: 'Mr. Cuthbert St. John Areley requests the pleasure of Mr. Blank's company at Dinner on the—' All that sort of thing. Well, whether the girl was bribed or whether he left the locker open, I can't tell you, but when Areley turned up at the Mitre at ten to seven to see that everything was all right, the waiter said to him: 'Six gentlemen have arrived, sir.'"

Moss threw himself back and gurgled delightedly. "Oh, I see," he cried, rather tactlessly anticipating Ditton's point.

Wray flung him a look of admiration; never had he met anything so fly as Moss.

"So," Ditton pursued, "dear old Areley went up feeling very flustered and all that, because he had not

been there to receive his guests, and wondered whether his watch was slow. But when he got in —” Ditton paused impressively — “he found Melton in his flannels, and Cotton, the labour man, with a deerstalker on his head and a bull-dog pipe in his mouth. And there was Rayne, who’s on the edge of the Church; he was looking at Cotton, who’s an atheist, as if he were a centipede.”

“Anybody else?” asked Huncote. “Though that sounds promising.”

“There were three more,” said Ditton, with immense seriousness. “There was Tid who’d been, well, let us say got ready by a few of us, for he was so blind that he’d slipped off his chair and was holding it affectionately by the leg, while Warcop, the chap who came up from the Polytechnic but happened to have lived mostly in India, was trying his best not to be sick as he looked at Rajah Abdur Singh who that night wore all, all, all his jewellery.”

There was a roar of laughter.

“And what did poor old Areley do?” asked Huncote.

“Well, what could he do?” said Ditton. “Those six had had invitation cards saying it was quite informal and no answer was expected. And they’d only had them two hours before the affair, so that they couldn’t let on, and they’d been told to come at a quarter to seven, and there was poor old Areley, dancing round like a dog who’s drunk ripolin in the scullery thinking it was milk, wondering what to do with the high-toned push coming on in another five minutes! I don’t know how he shot ’em out, but he did. Said something about the dinner being off and bolted down the stairs, told the waiter to put back the dinner and show the real lot into another room.”

“And did that settle it?” asked Moss. “Doubtful, if I know some of the men you mentioned.”

“It didn’t quite,” replied Ditton. “Five of them

22 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

went within half an hour or so, and the damage wasn't so serious except that something got burnt. But there wasn't another room, and they couldn't move Tid; he was so blind that not even the waiters could move him, because he hung on to that chair, murmuring something about drowning and that nobody should take his life belt; so they had to put him away under the sofa where, I'm told, the noises he made in the course of the evening seriously interfered with the debate as to whether Galsworthy and Bennett were written out."

Perhaps it was the ability with which Moss had selected the wines, but as the dinner went on Huncote found himself less awkward. He was talking more easily now to everybody in general rather than to his neighbour, and he began to rejoice in the behaviour of Wray who, eluding the vigilance of Moss, poured out over half a tumbler of sherry which he drank neat, remarking to Ditton that this was jolly good old Madeira. But a little later Wray grew a little difficult to manage, for he began a long anecdote about a very fat recruit whom his father had had in his regiment. The story was rather vague but, apparently, the recruit's trousers had not been properly fitted, with the result that in his excitement he simultaneously burst every button on Southampton wharf.

"Shut up! Alastair," said Moss, as he turned to Ditton and asked him whether he had taken his tip to back Mangold Pheasant for the City and Suburban.

And Huncote tried to help by asking Wray the same question. But the young man had reached the dogged stage of drink and from time to time burst out with his story.

"I shouldn't hedge if I were you," said Moss. "Either Carlsbad wins, or it's anybody's race. You might as well back the field, for all you know about anything else's form."

"And so they locked him up in the waiting room

while they sent up to the depot for another pair, and when they came back with one the ship had sailed —”

“ I got the tip from Lulu Malavine,” said Moss, “ and she got it straight from Lane, the trainer, himself.” He sniggered. “ You bet Lane told her the truth. There are hours and there are moments when Lulu will make him tell her anything.”

“ And on board it was the same thing; the new pair was the same size, you see, and they didn’t happen to carry a tailor. So the governor says they put him in a kilt, and he hadn’t been half an hour in Cape Town before he got arrested for bringing the Queen’s uniform into —”

Wray had now fastened upon Ditton in particular; so Moss and Huncote were thrown together, and from the charms of Lulu, on which Moss dilated with an expertness that Huncote thought quite disgusting, somehow passed to music.

“ I’m not running him down exactly,” said Moss, “ but Chopin always makes me think of a middle-aged Victorian lady who was pretty once upon a time and remembers it, and waves a little handkerchief, scented with lavender, upon which, at proper musical intervals, she drops a little tear. But if you agree with me, I’m surprised you won’t take up Bach.”

“ Maths,” said Huncote, rather superciliously.

“ Well, what more do you want?” said Moss, very serious. “ Aren’t maths beautiful? Is there anything more beautiful than a sphere? Think of the differences between geometrical figures, of the square,—so determined, lumpy, John Bullish; and what about the trapeze,—that slithery Machiavelli of geometry.” His dark eyes glittered with the delight that anything purely intellectual always gave him. “ Think of their movements, too,” he said, “ of the cycloid that goes on and on for ever, always travelling back and always travelling on.” He blew. “ Why, to think of the

thing's exciting! The cycloid is just like a fugue, always rising and falling, always seeming about to resolve itself and never doing it quite, but always carrying you, note by note, nearer to some wonderful satisfaction. See what I mean?"

"Yes, I think I do," said Huncote. His ears automatically registered Ditton's "steady-on, old chap" as Wray bellowed forth the possible end of his possibly endless story; the recruit had now been put into the trousers of a Boer farmer because they were the largest in South Africa! But Huncote was puzzled by the queer little Jew, the aptness of this comparison of his and the much more singular fact that together with a sharp intellect a swooning æstheticism could be found in the mean and mercenary son of a Hampstead stockbroker. Odd, too, he remembered that in Moss's rooms, in addition to his rare enamels, there were two pictures of puppies. Well! Huncote had been there once and now, as he stared at Moss who looked at him with a disgusting smug smile, pleased to think that he taught the superior Christian something, he could see those two pictures: a puppy flying furiously at its own reflection in a mirror, entitled: "If you see a good thing, go for it." And the other, the same puppy, galloping with a wasp on its tail, called: "If you are on a good thing, stick to it!"

Huncote felt that there were in Moss things that he would never understand, and he wondered for a moment whether indeed this was not a case of East being East. He felt more charitably inclined to Moss, and as he sipped his port he thought he would get hold of him in the coming week and see whether there really was a race difference. He could not, he thought, discuss just then a problem which Moss doubtless thought delicate.

Hardly had they passed into the street than Huncote experienced a new sensation or rather an increase in

the pleasant light sensation he had felt towards the end of dinner. It had been very slight at the Trocadero and here, in Coventry Street, a cool little wind blew from the east; it felt quite sharp in comparison with that languid air full of scents of women, food, and flowers. There was nothing wrong, but Huncote knew that he was walking; he could see perfectly straight, but he realised that he was seeing; somehow the whole of those functions of the body which usually are unconscious had suddenly become a little insistent. He heard himself laughing once and thought the sound silly. It was an epitome of Huncote's past life that he should wonder what was the matter with him. He felt inclined to tell Moss, who was explaining in a high and assured voice where he would find sentimentality in Wagner, that he thought lobster was indigestible. He pulled himself up because he was not quite sure that he had eaten lobster; it might have been crayfish. Anyhow, both of them were very bad foods for June. At that moment Ditton, who had been walking behind affectionately linked with Wray, drew abreast of them; as he so did, he seemed to impel Huncote to the abominably familiar step of taking his other arm.

“ Steady on, old chap,” he murmured; “ it's a bit early for you to get rosy.”

“ Rosy? ” cried Huncote, rather angry. “ What the devil — ”

He stopped. Two women near a lamp-post opposite Appenrodt's stared, then obviously laughed at him. He grew very silent: had he had too much to drink? Absurd! He had had a glass of sherry and two glasses of Rudesheimer, or was it three? A glass of port too, he remembered that; and a liqueur with coffee.

“ Damn the liqueur! That might have done it.”

He swore several times to himself, then blinked vigorously as if to get rid of two invisible feathers that seemed to have stuck in his eyelashes. Then, rather

dimly, he heard Wray, to whom Ditton had evidently confided his disgrace.

"Is he? Well, that's two of us out of four. Not half bad for a quarter to ten."

Huncote felt disgusted as Ditton sniggered and told Wray he would have to put him to bed if he did not know nine o'clock when he heard it strike at St. Martin's church.

But at that moment, when there was passing through Huncote's mind the impulse to say aloud and very definitely "that he would not be a party to a disgusting d— d— debauch," they entered the blaze of the European's lamps, and the energy went out of Huncote. He was like a moth against an electric bulb, dazzled, half-distraught, and yet delighted, like a captured woman that is afraid and charmed. Everything looked unreal in that minute, the marble steps which he seriously counted, the two commissionaires, titanic against the pillars, the brilliant lobby dim in comparison with the arc lamps that above his head seemed to strike at him. The European was a monster snake fastening upon its quarry with immense blazing eyes until of its own free will it entered the big jaws and was swallowed. Even the crowd round him seemed fantastic,—the poorly clad girls and flashy men, here and there a gaudy creature whose hair in the dry light was as a flame, the poor crowd below the half-crown line, with open mouths watching the Olympians as they alighted from their cars on the edge of the red carpet, the Olympian men with the red and brown faces and the moulded heads of hair; their women, just big, scented rustles, so bold from head to waist and so furred and shrinking about the silk-clad ankles. . . .

Then here they were inside, all four in a row. Moss was at the end by Ditton; Wray came next, and Huncote, on the outside, found himself preoccupied by a fluffy person so pink that it was difficult to know where

she began and her blouse stopped, a little person who languished and sprawled and every now and then licked her lips with a flicking little pink tongue as if she were thinking of chocolate or kisses. Huncote pulled himself together, for the change from the rather sharp air of Leicester Square into the atmosphere of the European, which was rather like that of the restaurant, had done him good; his eyes were all right again now, and he could see quite clearly on the right and left of the stage, the enormous figure, 4, in the electric light. He heaved a sigh and laughed. “That’s better,” he thought, “it’s four right enough; I might have made it fourteen.”

He watched the turn with interest. The Four Tartinis, two men and two women, were doing rather wonderful acrobatic things: tossing each other into the air and, it seemed, remaining there suspended for an appreciable time. Huncote at once grew excited as if the drink had loosened something in him, and self-restraint had passed away. One of the men was tossing the other one into the air and catching him as he fell as if he were a ball, every time in an odder attitude. Huncote found himself quite tense, for it seemed as if inevitably he must miss; then he drew his breath sharply, for with a great effort the younger man had been thrown high into the air, and with incredible swiftness one of the girls had passed to the juggler a great cup, into which without a fraction of space to spare he received the falling man. Huncote found himself slightly blinking, absurdly wondering the while how it was that for the first time in his life he could enjoy an acrobat. The little pink girl, who all the while had been talking to her own male friend, threw him a sidelong glance and giggled; leaving her hands between those of her escort, she calmly laid her shoulder against Huncote’s. He looked at her sideways and then, as if something impersonal urged him on, contentedly thrust his own shoulder a little more forward. He felt faintly drowsy; he watched

idly upon the stage four pretty American girls who sang some idiotic chorus about doing something or other at a pinch, which resulted in something else being a cinch. He felt happy and took no notice of Wray, who now talked continuously in a contented undertone. The air was heavy with tobacco, and there were scents all about him; his mind seemed at rest, and his body was stimulated. He was conscious of many scents,—not only tobacco, but sweeter scents and rank ones of sweat, of burning oils, of hot paint; he could feel the velvet of the seat in front on his sprawling knees, the soft warmth of the girl's shoulder against his, the irritating tickle-tickle about his forehead when a feather from her hat touched him.

He lay back. He felt sultanian in this large cushioned seat, with his dancers performing over there for him to the sound of his own band. He grew interested, he particularised, he forgot the absurd chorus and, one by one, began to criticise his dancers: the tall girl upon the left, with the fine, well-set head and the tragic dark eyes made so deep by her blued eyelids, and the other tall one with the wicked red hair, and the third who didn't matter, and the little sprite in the middle who danced so quickly that every one of her pretty curves seemed as she moved to twinkle in the light. . . .

A comedian sang:

“Adam and Eve went out one day
To look at the shops down Eden way,
And when a tailor's shop they reached
Said Eve, 'It's time that you were breeched.'
Tum, tum, tee didlee um
Didlee din and didlee um.
Tum, tum, tee didlee um,
Said Adam, 'I'm a Scotchman.'”

In his laziness he was conscious of Wray, who now held him by the elbow and from time to time gently shook him to make sure he had his attention. With

some difficulty he pulled himself out of his drugged state and managed to listen; then he nearly laughed aloud: Wray seemed to have entered the third stage of drunkenness. From irrelevancy he had passed to women; now he was growing theological.

“ I don’t pretend to know much about these things, but what I say’s this: if there wasn’t anything after we’re dead, well, what’s to prevent one from being as big a rotter as one likes? ”

“ Oh, yes, quite so,” said Huncote lazily. He had settled the ethical question long ago. But Wray had not, and he went on at the ethics mixed up with the rules of good form which serve his kind as a faith and assert themselves after a bad evening at bridge, a crevice in the heart, or a heavy cold.

“ Awful cheek of me,” went on Lord Alastair, “ talking to you like this; I’m a plain man. The governor always called me the village idiot; still there’s something about babes and sucking somethings, ain’t there? I’ve forgotten the rest. Better ask Mossy; he knows everything, Mossy does.”

Then to Huncote’s delight, Wray leant across Ditton and bellowed: “ Mossy! I say, Mossy! What’s that in the Bible about babes and sucking somethings — you know, something that gives my sort a chance.”

Half a dozen people in the row in front turned, and Huncote found himself feebly giggling in answer to that long array of smiles. Somewhere, somebody said: “ Disgraceful! ” Huncote found himself still giggling as if he could not stop, and affectionately pushing his shoulder still farther on to meet the advances of the little pink girl who still made conscientious efforts to occupy both her neighbours together.

Ditton managed to suppress Wray, presumably by giving him a satisfactory message from Moss, for at intervals, as other turns flickered on the stage, comedienues in bodices cut as low as possible and skirts as high

30 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

as possible, burnt cork and red-nose men, and people who played tunes on tumblers, Huncote could hear him murmur:

"That's right. Mossy got it all right. Blowed if I know how he finds these things out." And from time to time he tugged at Huncote's sleeve. "He's a bloody marvel, don't you think? Eh?" And, although Huncote did not reply, "I quite agree with you."

Huncote was memorising from the programme the names of proprietor, managing director, assistant ditto, and manager. The words JEYES' FLUID grew enormous in his brain.

Then the interval, some music and a shuffle all over the theatre, stumblings over feet and protests against the squashing of hats. Huncote found himself threading his way out, Moss leading the way. Now that he moved he felt queer again; mechanically he registered that Moss was telling Ditton what he thought of Ganne, the strains of whom were, he declared, driving him into the promenade.

"I'd rather be as blind as Alastair," he said, "than listen to that flatulent muck any longer."

The promenade! This was the first time he had ever been in the European promenade. A few times before he had, with his mother and friends of her choosing, gone to the Alhambra or to theatres, but instinctively, as if something in him rebelled and were afraid, he had never before been entangled in those undergraduate parties that came to London to get gloriously drunk, to look at women with a dare-devil air and a shy, shrinking heart. And here he was pushed into it, right into the middle of it under the leadership of a man who seemed to have worn this excitement thin. Huncote stared about him as he were from Oxfordshire and not from Oxford. The crowded promenade filled him with amazement, this heterogeneous crowd of middle-aged men in hard hats and short coats, with pugnacious short

noses and a North-country air, the Londoners, some of whom actually wore the ties that one saw in the show cases. He identified a purple poplin, price half a crown and too small to tie, and absurdly thought himself very clever. Foreigners too, many of them negroid Portuguese or South American, German clerks, unable to move their necks inside their collars, and gabbling little Frenchmen who looked at the women with an air half-insolent, half-lascivious. But it was the women who affected him most. Their slow, circulating stream round the promenade, from the farthest right to the farthest left and then back again. They passed by him, nearly all furtively smiling, with a professional manœuvre of the eye. For a moment the flow stopped, and one of them, quite dark, with her hair dressed so low over her forehead that it almost touched her eyebrows, was wedged against him. She did not speak, but moulded herself against his shoulder and arm as if she were fluid and obedient. Her lips parted as she smiled a little. Slowly she raised her left eyelid, expanded the dark eye, rolling it inwards and then a little up; then the eyelid gradually fell, and the mouth grew demure. Huncote felt all shaken, but rather with fear than desire. Instinctively the woman knew it. She looked boldly into his eyes and then with a pout and the insolent air of one who cannot waste time, a shoulder movement that was half a shrug, she passed on leaving him wounded, as if somebody had called him: “ You little boy ! ” The words of a song, “ Painting the Parlour ”, passed through his darkness:

“ Mother stuck to the ceil-*ing*,
 Father stuck to the floor.
 You never saw such a happy home
 In all your life before.”

It had not lasted more than two or three seconds, but he felt so dulled that without any apparent struggle with his reason he agreed to Ditton's suggestion and

followed his friends into the bar. Indeed he found himself quite combative as he forced his way to the edge of the counter and with difficulty drew the attention of the flashy, tow-headed, and peach-skinned barmaid who, with such wonderful speed and an indolence almost graceful, tugged at various levers and poured from flying bottles. He drank his whisky and soda right off; more boldly he looked at the women on the seats around the saloon, many of them alone, some with one man, some laughing high in the midst of a group. He stared so aggressively at a young woman in scarlet that she got up, came to him, and said: "Hallo, saucy, aren't you going to stand me a drink?"

For the first time in his life Huncote found himself replying, "*Rather,*" without feeling at all sickened by his own poor archness. Things grew more confused. He drank off another whisky and soda with the girl in scarlet; he was conscious of some disagreement with Moss who had said something about "toms" which he did not understand. Then with clearing eyes he found that the girl in scarlet had linked arms with a neighbour, obviously a soldier in mufti, and that most of the other women were looking at him and ogling him as if they had marked him out as their special quarry. He was critical and bold now; he saw that the large creature heaving in her white frock like an enormous Dutch doll who had run up-stairs too fast must be over the twenty-three or twenty-four years she seemed to advertise. All of them, he could appraise at their true value: the slim dark snake in gold and amber, and the donah with the big white ruffle and the feather hat, and that dangerous little mincing fraud with the poke-bonnet and the innocent pink roses along the hem of her white frock. . . .

It seemed so very much later; first he was struggling out of the European with his friends, aware of one thing only, a fierce and continuous blowing of cab whistles

and something large that solemnly said: “ Pass along there! Pass along, gentlemen, please,” something that shoved and got in the way.

Then he was in a taxi, along with Wray, his other companions lost in the crowd. With Wray’s arm round his neck, Wray rather tearful now and, strangest of all, two girls he did not know, whom he had not even seen inside the European; one of them screamed with laughter at something unknown, and the other, just a dark, veiled languor, sat silent in the corner.

And then it all went on as if he were tumbling down a soft slope. He giggled as he thought of old-fashioned games, of rolling down Primrose Hill; it must have felt a little like that. And lights and “ s’more ” food somewhere, and “ s’more ” to drink. Everything seemed to go so fast somehow and other things to happen so unexpectedly. For what was he doing now? All alone this time in another cab, driving to he did not know where with a fair-haired somebody who seemed to think everything so funny.

The somebody said one thing he remembered: “ Shut your face, dear; I see your Christmas dinner.”

It was several days later before he could remember some of the rest, and then it was not much: brilliant streets giving place to quieter ones, broad roads where they were still selling vegetables, with trams passing in the middle, roaring and coming out of the night like fireflies. And a tall, dirty dark house somewhere in Clerkenwell; a long wait upon the step; then a black passage where you felt your way and found the walls sticky, and staggered up the stairs clutching at the banisters, slippery with dirt. And then a sort of growing uneasy gap of time, an inability to realise what happened, whether pleasing or abominable. He did not know. It was as if he had been thrown out of a dream into life about four o’clock in the morning to find himself standing in the middle of Theobald’s Road, with

34 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

his waistcoat pockets turned inside out, his watch gone, a palate like a nutmeg grater, and a head into the left side of which some engineer was steadily boring a tunnel.

For a minute or two he did not know where to go. He did not know London well. If only he could find Paddington or Euston! He knit his brows in the effort to make up his mind, and it hurt his head, as if even his mind ached. The night was cold, and above a very deep-blue heaven, studded with golden stars, looked down upon him with an air of detachment; there were no trams and no stalls now, and the shops were shuttered; there was nobody about except a sleepy bundle of rags and dirt on the steps of a bank. Huncote looked vaguely at the thing, male or female, who could say? Sex seemed to have fled with youth and beauty from the dim thing that crouched against the stone, losing less warmth to that cold stone than it would have lost to the cold wind. He gazed half-fascinated at the feet lost in enormous boots with soles gaping away from the uppers; one foot was revealed by a strip of dirty pink flesh. He thought of asking the thing his way. Then he shuddered; he could not draw nearer to It somehow. He was afraid of It, as one is afraid of a body that has died horribly and that gapes with disease or blood, as one is afraid unreasonably of a harmless ghost. But then the thing was dead in a way, except that it still crawled about. No, he could not ask It—the way to the Ritz, for argument's sake. He laughed; It seemed humorous somehow. But abruptly his laughter stopped; he felt ashamed as if the creature could know that he was taunting it with wealth. So very softly he tiptoed a little nearer, conscious all the time of that nibbling ravage in his head, found a forgotten shilling among coppers in his trousers pocket, and very carefully dropped the coin near the folded arm,

And then silently he crept away, afraid to wake It lest It might be too hateful, or perhaps because he felt, before the thing that life had left stranded high above watermark, that silent respect which one feels before the dead. It had followed him as he walked towards the north, because he did not know where to walk to; he felt It behind him, silent at first like a shadow, and then more insistent. He looked around, and there was nothing. He hurried on and could hear behind him the clap-clap of the loose soles. It was abominable, this flight from the hound of heaven. He passed through big, silent squares with red doors and green doors, all of them nicely painted, twinkling in the gas lamps with every knocker and bell-pull nicely polished, smugly insinuating that one could not live there under two pounds a week (or more). It was all so silent except for the invisible soles and their clap-clap which, as he walked faster, turned into a rapid shuffle. His nerves were in pieces, and he had to reason with himself to prevent himself from running.

Then he was in the Euston Road and across it, happier, easier now, for a few taxis passed, coming out of the station, and there was more light; a couple of policemen who looked eternal and immovable, as all policemen after a while come to look, stood together by the side of a gas lamp, a comforting lump of law and order. Huncote went towards them full of the immense sense of relief of the well-to-do who always go towards the police instead of turning away from them. They would know. But as he drew near, he hesitated. He listened; there was nothing behind him now, as if It feared light and policemen, as if It could not follow him into those places where was food and strength. And at once Huncote realised that he missed It now, that it made him feel base to have deserted It, to have walked so fast that It could not catch him up. A lame dog had tried to get over a stile: he had not helped it.

What was the use of a shilling? Indeed he might have struck it if it tried to struggle over. So he passed by the two policemen without speaking to them. They looked inquisitorially at this tall young man with the wry tie and the wild air. The look lasted not a second, for the experts knew what was the matter with him and did not want the worthless credit of interfering with a man who . . .

One policeman put it to the other: "Booze! What's o'clock?"

But as he passed them and for a moment encountered the cold gaze that seems to pierce all coverings, Huncote had shrunk away; he had wondered what they thought, whether they would speak to him, whether somehow he had not done something wrong, just as if the thing which had accompanied him and its shuffle-shuffle had entered into him and filled him with its fears. It was horrible, this sense of unity, and then for a moment it was delightful. That night, caught in the web of an instinct he did not understand, which had never touched him before, he had in a drunken dream attempted in the arms of woman to achieve union with his fellows. He had failed, and here he was with a hot mouth and tight eyes. Then quite suddenly, without word or touch, his fellows had come to him out of that verminous heap of dirt, clasped him. Oh, preposterous prodigy! As Huncote walked on through little streets, darker and darker, passed public houses where glimmered but one light at the back, there was something radiant in his soul that he could not express yet. His head hurt less now, for the night air soothed it, and he saw details better. Dawn was breaking and very faintly; here and there he could hear life being born again with a few sighs. Indeed it was dawn, and over the flat top of a coal-yard he saw it coming; the deep blue of the sky had already greyed, and now into the grey climbed a mauveness that with every moment

enriched itself with rose. Everything was silent still, so silent that as a great blush tinged the eastern sky he started when a cock crowed. He listened for the cock to crow again, but for a long time it did not. Only a man passed in the uniform of the Great Northern. Huncote, in his receptive state of mind, guessed that he was going to work at King's Cross. Bells struck at the neighbouring church: a quarter to five. At once Huncote felt a pang of remorse, and many things streamed up before him. He thought of the rich and of himself on other mornings at a quarter to five, sleeping with their cheeks upon a feather pillow while this railwayman, dragged from his bed in the night, went out to carry the rich to their pleasure. It was abominable, this contrast.

The railwayman stopped at the corner to light his pipe, and then he went on, occasionally taking the pipe from his mouth to whistle the British Grenadiers. If Huncote had heard him it would have interfered with the dream.

And the pageant of early morning London unrolled. A belated cart rumbled past him towards Covent Garden, heaped high with carrots that glowed in the dawn, mystic vegetables of an Andersen fairy tale. Milk carts began to rattle by, bounding upon the stones, the most vital of all carts. But at the corner of a street, the name of which he read casually, Fordingley Road, was a coffee stall with its lights still defying the coming day, and Huncote, realising that he was thirsty, went up to the stall and asked for a cup of coffee. Never before had he been to a coffee stall, and it looked queer, like the kitchen of a caravan in a novel, with its swinging oil lamp and polished reflector, its white crockery, the piles of bread and butter that looked tempting in front of the urn. Huncote, as he began to drink the coffee, which was burning hot, threw a sidelong glance at the cheerful Silenus who kept the stall; he looked

large, because over his vast paunch spread a white apron, and cheerful, with bulging cheeks touched by rosacia, and forward juttings made up of his mouth, his chin, his second chin, and probably his third chin. The man watched Huncote narrowly, for he was not one of those West End stall-keepers who are well accustomed to customers in evening dress.

"Cold night for this time of the year."

"Yes, isn't it?" said Huncote. Then, feeling it necessary to say something more: "Don't you find it trying?"

"Oh, I dunno," said the stall-keeper, "you got to take the good with the bad. Life, you know, it's just one damn thing after another, eh, Mike?" He turned towards the other customer, a labourer on his way to work who evidently found it more convenient to have his breakfast at the stall than at the doss.

Mike had the bulkiest shoulders and the smallest legs that Huncote had ever seen. He was blue-jawed and hoarse, with a flashy red-and-green choker of which he evidently was proud, for he had spread both ends over his shirt.

"Aye," he said. He threw an inquisitive glance at Huncote. Somehow a gentleman made him feel half-awkward, half-hostile. Then, very curiously: "Off to see yer Aunt Maria?"

"I beg your pardon," said Huncote; "what did you ask?"

"Oh, nothin', on'y wondered."

Well, of course, they would wonder, but Huncote wished he knew what the man had asked him. Without understanding him quite, he was still craving for community. The stall-keeper helped him a little by returning to the consideration of life.

"Yes," he said, half to himself, "life's a funny thing. You never ask for it, and you have it shoved on to you, and you take a sort o' fancy to it."

“ Gawd knows why,” remarked Mike.

“ I don’t know why,” said the stall-keeper aggressively, “ an’ if Gawd can’t tell yer I can’t; but there it is, and just about the time when you’ve got kind o’ fond of it, well, it goes.”

“ Cheer up,” remarked Mike, “ you won’t be missed.”

“ Dartmoor’ll be sorry when you’re took,” said the stall-keeper casually, succumbing to a forty-year-old habit of giving tit for tat. “ But, as I was saying, life’s a funny thing; it comes and it goes,—like the rheumatics. It’s ten o’clock and I gets the stall out; and then it’s one o’clock and the flashy sort drops in with their fancy men after they’ve ’ad a bit of a go-in in the Tottenham Court Road.” He turned towards Huncote. “ We get a regular West End crowd in these parts,” he said, rather proudly. “ And then it sort o’ scatters. There’s a man from the market now and then, and Euston o’ course. Then later on perhaps a dog or two, and that sort there, that’s on its uppers.” Huncote followed the direction of his glance and for the first time became conscious of another figure, a man leaning against a lamp-post, curiously angular, with sharp knobs where his knees were and a suggestion of elbow and collar bone under his thin coat. Nothing aggressive or philosophic about him, he seemed to stand near the coffee stall because in a way light was warmth. A little coalition formed between Mike and the stall-keeper.

“ Of course it wouldn’t do to give him a cup o’ corfee for the arskin’ . . . ”

“ Don’t want to do the Salvation Army out of a job.”

“ Still, if a gent wants to stand treat . . . ”

Huncote understood, and his heart grew soft: these two men, neither of whom could well afford to feed a poor devil, were trying to help him somehow. Huncote went to the man against the lamp-post; he felt shy but

yet not quite so shy as when he dropped the shilling beside that folded arm.

"Hungry?" he said. The man did not reply. He was still leaning against the lamp-post, looking at him with vacuous eyes. Huncote made an effort, took him by the arm. "Have a cup of coffee with me," he said. The man did not move, and as Huncote looked he found that he had coiled an arm round the lamp-post. He shrank away, for the thing was limp. He was dead.

"Wish I'd known," said the stall-keeper, a little later. "Been standin' there two or three hours; they very often does, you know; they get something in the end. Mike, I say, Mike."

But Mike was already ten paces away. He turned as he went and called over his shoulder:

"I ain't seen nothing, you don't get *me* for no bloody coroner's job."

"Can't leave the stall," said its owner; "you might tell a policeman when you see one." And he sighed comfortably. "Sparrows can't fall without His 'avin' a hand in it, as they says in church."

As he walked away in the growing light, Huncote realised that this was life. Here were the people, speaking a language he hardly understood, using grammar that was repulsive to him, eating food that sickened him and probably not enough of that, anxious lest they should be late for work and lose it. Dirty, unshaven, untaught, sleepless. And he donnish and modish! He was conscious of a violent artificiality in the life he led, an artificiality which, if it locked the poor out, locked him in. As the people grew about him in the early morning, the men with their tool-bags, the girls hurrying towards the trams with little pinched faces, the newspaper boys, distributing the folded sheets before they went to school, Huncote realised that here indeed was something that called him, something that needed him; the activities that had rebelled against the other

artifices, the fellowship and the spree at the European, were to wed him unto the people, to bring him close to them, to make their lives lighter, to fill his own. It was delicious; it was like a personal revelation.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

THE PEACE OF ST. OLAVES

I

"I WONDER," said Huncote aloud, "why I didn't tell Gorsley."

He was alone in a railway carriage, on his way to St. Olaves. He had left Euston regretfully, for he had not been so long in London as not to love her as she lay in her shroud of grey mist, as a sleeping beauty behind thickets. He sighed as he left behind him in Euston yard the struggle of the taxis, the urgent life, the fact that in this town one counted in millions. And so, as the slow train puffed and hesitated over the little viaduct that spans the reservoir whence are discovered the two Welsh Harps, he saw no beauty in the plain that rises and falls softly as a girl's breast. It was cold, and autumn hung with blue streamers of mist hedges rarely flecked with crisp red berries. Roger Huncote lay back, his beautiful hands negligent in his lap, the little frown between his eyebrows more sharply brought out by perplexity. He looked worried that morning, but whether because he was surprised by his own instinct or because he did not know whether he was going to enjoy St. Olaves he could not tell. Simultaneously, it seemed, he was thinking of his rooms in Clare Street and of the Settlement he had left behind. Those rooms, at first so unfamiliar, and that Settlement, — large, white, and monastic, — in the corridors of which he lost himself, had already grown intimate after a week; they were homes. It was curious, he thought, that he had not been able to tell Gorsley that Bar and

Church, and even Indian Civil were not for him, but that he had joined the St. Panwich Lay Settlement with the intention of "bringing a gleam of sunshine into the life of the poor." He shrank as he thought of the phrase which had been used in Churton's office, when he in a way enlisted, by a lady he did not know, who later, he remembered, talked at great length and with extreme violence about the iniquity of the White Slave Traffic.

There was something wrong about the phrase. Huncote's culture, which was mainly Latin and Greek, rebelled against it. But then he told himself not to be priggish. Not to be priggish seemed indeed just now his chief occupation, for he realised, little by little, that if he had not told Gorsley it was because this offering-up of self would have seemed priggish; also Gorsley would have wanted to know why and how and when (let alone if and though), and that would have meant telling him how three months before he had got drunk and — and a lot more; been a blood, in fact. And Huncote realised that it would have made him still more priggish in his own eyes to pose as a reformed blood, a sort of St. Paul or Ignatius of Loyola. Indeed, it was not only with Gorsley that he had felt this; he had felt it with other people whom he had told. He tried to pass it off lightly as "getting an idea of the condition of the people", or used other glib phrases which led people to believe he intended to stand for Parliament. He did not quite deny this, so that his romantic intentions were accepted as odd but fairly respectable.

Still, as the telegraph wires ran up and down by his window and he drew nearer to St. Olaves, he felt the halo getting heavier on his head. He laughed; the higher one got up in sainthood the larger the halo grew; there must be a moment when it gave one a headache, and sin took the place of phenacetin. They would look at him, he knew, as if he were a curate without the dignity of office, something like a dancing dervish trained

to a certain extent by a public school. And the worst of it was that so far he had done nothing much at the Settlement; he had learnt the geography of St. Panwich, which had been a rather disgusting affair, as it seemed continually to lead him into little streets from which the refuse was swept only by heavy rains, into roaring ways full of trams, and, worse still perhaps, into bare silent places where on the one side were genteel homes of sooty brick and stucco, with Nottingham lace curtains, "Apartment" cards, green china flowerpots (or pink), in the ground-floor front window, and on the other side a blank wall extending, it seemed, for miles, along a railway-goods yard or an India-rubber works, unless the smell was bad malt. Those were the worst streets, so long and bleak, so populous between eight and nine and six and seven, when clerks and shorthand ladies issued forth or returned, deserted at other times, and maintaining so well the private contempt that prevents Number 10 from being contaminated by Number 11. Much better he liked Crapp's Lane that straggled away behind the Settlement, full of barrows, aggressive, kindly costers, tired women with resigned string bags, and pink, shouting butchers. He had addressed envelopes for a meeting: the first dozen had been quite exciting. He had checked accounts and, on being told to do so, more or less forged a voucher for expenses. Since then he went about rather uneasy in case one day the auditor should find it out. Still, he had his halo. Sticky things, haloes!

Elsbeth was waiting for him at the station. This was exactly what he did not want; if it had been his mother or fluffy Flora there would have been tittle-tattle about the neighbours, or they would have talked about the weather or something. But here was Elsbeth, dark, brown-eyed, thin-lipped, rather flat-chested, as usual in well-fitting tweeds, with her air of knowing what she wanted in life and doing it too, confound her! Hun-

cote disliked Elspeth as a woman and liked her as a companion, a horrid combination when one is feeling nervous.

"Hallo!" said Elspeth.

"Hallo!" said Huncote. He struggled with his bag.

"Let me give you a hand," said Elspeth.

"Oh, don't trouble."

But as he tried to get the bag, which was rather too long, through the carriage doorway, Elspeth's hard, capable hand shot out, seized one of the handles, and with one haul brought the bag thudding on to the platform. Huncote followed without a word of thanks. He hated Elspeth in her moods of hearty efficiency, but she, quite unconscious, had already called a porter by a loud "Hi!" and in a few seconds was bustling brother, porter, and bag towards the wicket.

When they got into the High Street Huncote had to answer a few questions. Yes, he was feeling pretty fit. Yes, he had had a good journey. For Elspeth, in virtue of living at St. Olaves ten months or so a year, had the country habits of such interests. As they went on he had to say how long he was staying and what train he thought he would catch on the way back, also to notice the new wing at the fire station to which Elspeth added a threat that he should visit it on Monday before he left. He grew quite sulky.

Hang the girl with her little interests. And then he pulled himself up. No, he mustn't be priggish, he mustn't be swollen out with his metropolitan quality, his experience of the lower classes. He was about to frame an intelligent question destined to lead Elspeth to talk of the things that interested them both, the latest essays, for instance, when again he was paralysed by the idea that if he did that he would feel still more patronising. Fortunately Mrs. Huncote's house lay but ten minutes from the station and, fortunately too, he arrived so late as to have but a few minutes over

before he dressed for dinner. And so he just had time to kiss his mother and Flora, who were quite shrill and excited and trickling comments on his new suit and the extortionate behaviour of the porter, before he went to his bedroom. It struck him that he had not kissed Elspeth: somehow one didn't. With a little sigh of exasperation he undid his bag and began to dress. There was about all this something that annoyed him and made him think of a cloud of midges dancing in the summer above a road.

II

The Huncotes were a family without a history in the sense that theirs was so very much the history of any other family. There was not even a black sheep in the colonies; the nearest approach was Roger in the Settlement. Colonel Huncote had hidden away his wife and family in the house at St. Olaves in the way common to soldiers who have entrusted their destinies to the Colonial Office. From time to time Mrs. Huncote had disappeared, leaving the house in charge of her elder sister, now dead, to join her husband for a few months in East Africa or Singapore. But by the time Roger was ten his father was dead, killed under Kitchener at Omdurman, and Mrs. Huncote had settled into pretty widowhood. Of the three children Elspeth alone remembered the wanderer at all well, the queer beads and the silver-studded shawls he brought from foreign parts. Flora had but one memory of him, a box of Turkish delight which she vowed he must have bought at Pera, which was not likely. For Roger his father was a sort of legend whose tellings had not always coincided with the holidays of his first year at the preparatory, something that had dropped assegais about the house and then vanished, leaving his mother the pretty centre of a private world. It was fortunate from his son's point

of view that Colonel Huncote had not lived, for they were so much alike that they would probably have disliked each other intensely; he would have disliked his father as he disliked Elspeth and not forgiven him, because to a man what is annoying in a woman is hateful in another man. Colonel Huncote had all the hard, generous absurdity of his son,—principles, sense of duty, and so forth. He had made up his mind to serve the Empire just as Roger made up his mind to serve the people; he had thought woman inferior and lovable, and so he had left his son about seven hundred a year, with the reversion after his mother's death of a further nine hundred, while Elspeth and Flora were given two hundred and fifty a year each when their mother died; until then nothing. All through their life their freedom was to be measured out by trustees; he had thought that women should rule the household, and that was why Mrs. Huncote dominated her daughter's incomes, but subject to man, so she too had trustees. And he emphasised his belief in man by letting Roger, of whom he was proud because the child had achieved the feat of being his only son, to have seven hundred a year to play with when he was twenty-one.

All this in a way had repeated itself in Roger, though never having had to think of money he never thought of it now. While dependence had made Elspeth hard and Flora sly, independence had made Roger ignorant. He had been a rich undergraduate, but he had not been an extravagant one. For, like his father, he was not very liable to impulses. Ideas came to him slowly, and when they came they set every day harder and harder, like cement. Intuitions came to him too, but only by degrees, and that was why he made few friends, for by the time he had become quite sure that he wanted to know them they had generally got a little tired of wanting to know him.

Always he felt a little his isolation; he was capable

of everything that those close-set, deep-set eyes promised: every generosity, every heroism, every folly, and every cruelty, when once the impelling idea had properly got into his head. But an impulse had made him follow when Swinburne piped: though he could not be influenced he could be carried away, because he disliked to refuse to do anything that somebody else wanted him to do. He had got drunk because he might have hurt Ditton's feelings if he refused to drink; and it was quite possible, though he would never know it, that some obscure sense of chivalry had prevented him from leaving in the lurch that fair-haired creature, whose face he certainly could not remember, and refusing to drive with her to Theobald's Road. So he rather disliked his own impulses; they were things that interfered with his calm affections, with the reasonable allowances he liked to make for people's unreasonableness. He was troubled with youth, or rather he had the mind of a man in the body of a boy. There lay his secret weakness, the idealism that made him the prey of his own ideal. Romantic, he wanted to believe what he believed just because he believed it, and it was cricket to go on believing it. When in a romantic mood his reason could be snubbed, and he could hope, pursuing the shadow, to turn it into a prey.

III

"Well," said Mrs. Huncote, with the cheerful, smiling emphasis that generally accompanies that word, "and how d'you like the Settlement?"

"I can't say yet, Mother," said Huncote. "After a week you'd hardly expect me to."

"Still," said Elspeth, "you must have formed some idea of whether it's any good."

"Oh, of course, it's some good," said her brother; "anybody could see that, but I can't make up my mind

like that." He stopped. He felt dishonest; he was really enthusiastic about the Settlement, but it seemed youthful to show it. Moreover Elspeth was again being truculent.

"So," said Flora, throwing him from her large grey eyes one of her archest looks, "so, Roger, we shan't see you with your collar back to front, shall we?" Huncote looked irritated, and Flora went on chipping him, much to his annoyance, for they were at dinner and the parlourmaid was listening. "I've always wanted to have a brother in the Church," said Flora sweetly. "Somebody who looked starved and pale and interesting, you know, Roger. Somebody rather saintly; they look so nice at tea. But, oh, I do wish they wouldn't wear collars like that; why can't they wear something really nice — let us say an amethyst toby frill?"

Mrs. Huncote laughed. "Hush, Flora! That sounds very ritualistic. What would the Dean say if he heard you?"

Even Elspeth entered into the chipping. "Anyhow, saints never shave and seldom wash, Roger; think of the trouble it'll save you!"

Her brother flung her a savage look; somehow, though he prized her intelligence, he stood less from her than from his lighter mother and sister. "Don't be silly," he snapped, "you know quite well there's nothing churchy about the Settlement. We're just a little crowd who have come together to see if we can teach the —" He became fiercely oppressed by the maid who held on his left a dish of finger chips. "Well, you know what I mean, people who aren't as well off as we are."

He helped himself to potatoes revengefully, because the maid had a rather coarse red hand, and he was acutely conscious of the social difference between it and the rosy finger-tips that played with Flora's napkin ring. There was a little silence on this serious proclamation. Elspeth gave a faint sniff, and Flora hesi-

50 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

tated as if she had been caught teasing an elephant with a peacock's feather. Then Mrs. Huncote, who already repented of the teasing she had been a party to, said, quite mildly:

"Well, well, leave him alone, girls; after all, we must all do something in life."

This diplomatic speech was to Roger more galling than even the teasing, for his mother meant that he had "taken up" social work as he might have "taken up" journalism or golf. But he blessed her for the diversion and strove to increase the gap by introducing a new subject. The parlourmaid having left the room, he plunged.

"How's Trunch? I haven't seen him yet."

Mrs. Huncote looked rather demurely towards the table-cloth. Flora began to giggle and was sternly admonished by Elspeth not to be a little fool, upon which Roger followed up his advantage. "So, Mother, I see from the way you take this question that the terror of St. Olaves has been at it again."

"Roger!"

"It's no use looking shocked. Why don't you dismiss him if you feel like that about him?"

"You know quite well I can't send him away," said Mrs. Huncote, "even if —"

"Every nice girl loves a coachman," Flora sang softly.

Even Elspeth laughed.

"And who's the lady? Or rather who was the lady yesterday — for there's no knowing who it is today?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Mrs. Huncote, very staid. "Trunch doesn't come to me with his stories."

"No, Mother darling," said Flora, "but he goes to Betty, the only woman in the world he can treat as a confidant because she happens to be sixty-two, and she comes to you, and so you do know, and you may as well

tell Roger, because what you won't tell him Betty tells — well, I won't say who, and she tells me."

Mrs. Huncote tried to look severe, grew resigned, then humorously pathetic. "What am I to do with these children, Roger? They do grow up so."

At that moment Roger, who had as a way out plunged into their coachman's amorous adventures, suddenly felt that the topic should not be discussed before Flora, even if she did know all about it. "A girl's a girl, after all," he thought. "She may know, but she shouldn't seem to."

When dessert was on the table Mrs. Huncote summed up the situation: "No, I couldn't dismiss Trunch really; he's been with me thirteen years, and he was with your father ten years before that. One must make allowances, Roger."

Huncote felt a warm little rush of affection as he looked at his pretty mother, still young somehow, though fifty-one, in her funny semi-art, semi-messy clothes, with her fair and grey, untidy but pretty hair, and her general likeness to a hollyhock after a shower. Besides, his own expedient for getting rid of an inconvenient topic was used against him. His mother began to discuss *The Golden Bowl* and grew rather eloquent as to the merits of Mr. Henry James. He was her favourite author, and she loved him best in his later moods. She forgave him *Roderick Hudson* and the other intelligible portions of his works, because one had to make allowances for youth, and even Mr. Henry James must have been young sometime. For a while Roger and his mother discussed Henry James with a little assistance from Elspeth who frankly hated him, while Flora said nothing and played "He loves me, he loves me not" with the salted almonds. At last she could bear it no more and, using a gap in the conversation, thrust in the dull subject of the dull autumn.

"No more tennis," she sighed, "and uninteresting

tea parties in drawing-rooms instead of in gardens, and no dances for another month or two! I wish I could shoot." She was rallied for a while, reminded that she could not throw a cricket ball. She looked very pretty and mutinous, but the conversation tailed off until at last the three women left Roger alone for five minutes with the port decanter, so that it should not be said that the isolation of the male after dinner had not been paid its traditional tribute. For a few moments Huncote thought of this conversation.

Heavens! How awkward it was. They had nibbled at the Settlement and chaffed about it; they had nibbled at that nonsense about their coachman who, at the age of forty-eight, had more love affairs in a month than Huncote had had in his whole life; and even the discussion on Henry James had tailed off on side issues, on silly little jokes about sentences of twenty-three lines. It was as if everything between him and his people were railed-off, as if something stood between them and prevented them from being simple with each other; could they really believe that in a sort of way he had gone into the Church? That would make a difference, of course; they would be mortals talking to one dedicated to the other world. "Ridiculous!" he summed up, finished the port, and went into the drawing-room.

He remained uneasy. Mrs. Huncote sat at the secretaire, "just finishing off a letter", as she put it (she was always finishing off a letter), while Elspeth talked of the doings of people in St. Olaves, most of whom he did not know, and Flora flourished on the piano the turkey trot and the bunny hug which had just come to town. It was only a little later, when at ten o'clock Mrs. Huncote said she must have a little walk in the garden before going to bed, that some ease and sincerity came to her son.

The garden was large and old-fashioned; it was cut

off from the house by a shrubbery. Before this was a bed where Mrs. Huncote planted Shakespeare flowers. Beyond were the tennis lawn and the pergola which ended in that secret and delightful kitchen garden, where Roger as a small boy had so often raided the currant bushes. For a minute or two mother and son, arm in arm, walked along the paths talking desultorily without listening much to what they were saying. The night was neither warm nor cold, and a brilliant moon made the gravel silvery and the shrubs thick black. There was no noise at all except now and then, and it seemed far away in the house, a few notes of a two-step scattered from Flora's piano.

"Roger," said Mrs. Huncote suddenly, "are you quite sure that you've chosen the right thing?"

"I think so, Mother."

"If you really think that it's all right; you know I wouldn't go against anything you wanted; you do know that, Roger?" she said, a little anxiously.

"Dear little Mother," said Huncote, and squeezed her arm.

"Only," Mrs. Huncote went on, "I want you to be sure. You will be sure by and by, and I want you to promise me something."

"What is it?"

"I want you to promise me not to go on if at any time you feel you don't want to. I mean, if you find you've made a mistake, that your heart isn't in the work. Roger dear, you won't do anything silly like that, will you? If you find you've made a mistake, you won't be proud and go on when you ought to give it up?"

"That's all right, Mother," said Roger, rather gruffly.

He thought her sweet and delicate. She disapproved of what he was doing and very sweetly hinted that though she disapproved he might be right; she was his

mother, and whether he did right or wrong she was going to try to prevent him from making himself unhappy.

"Yes," he said, more assured now, "I do feel I've done the right thing. I don't fancy anything else, either. I don't want to be a soldier, and I shouldn't do any good at the Bar, I don't talk well enough. Besides — oh, Mother, if you could see the things I've been seeing not only this week but before, the horrible poverty and the dirt, all sorts of things which make you want to go out and stop them."

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Huncote, a little shaken by his earnestness, "I know, Roger. Of course one does what one can with charity and all that, and I know it isn't much. Sometimes I feel we ought to let the poor alone a little. There are lots of horrid things in the world which we have to let alone."

"Trunch," said Roger, suddenly mocking.

"Don't be silly, Roger; I can't send him away. It's not only that I'm sentimental because he's been with the family so long, but in these days — one gets so mixed up about sex-problems with the things one hears and reads."

Roger smiled in the darkness and pressed her arm again. She was charming with her muddled impulses and her incoherence. He loved the way in which she doubtfully dispensed charity while reading socialist pamphlets which told her that charity created the evil which she relieved. And this Trunch, this absurd, perpetual Trunch case, which ended now and then by her soothing an infuriated mother, or remonstrating with Trunch and being worsted by his plea that the girl "come after him!" She was uncertain as a leaf upon the wind and, as a leaf, graceful.

IV

"Coming for a walk?" said Elspeth, at about a quarter to eleven on Sunday morning.

Huncote hesitated for a moment before replying. As a rule he had gone to church with his mother and both his sisters, that is before he went up to Oxford. And there he had done the usual sort of things, attended chapel because it saved him explanations and had to be done. But three years at Gabs brought a new quality into his churchgoing, broke the continuity of the affair. He saw Mrs. Huncote watching him over the *Observer*, and Flora and Elspeth too; they were all watching him: Mrs. Huncote half-humorously, Flora frankly mischievously, Elspeth rigid and rather truculent. And an inner Huncote watched him too with a complicated air. "You don't mind going to church," said the inner Huncote, "only if you do they'll think you're churchy because you're in the Settlement; and so you'd better not go because, though church isn't really churchy, in you it would seem churchy." So he said, with an affectation of ease which he did not feel:

"Right oh! When do we start?"

"In a minute," said Elspeth. "Let me finish a note, will you?"

Huncote did not even light a cigarette, for he knew Elspeth's notes; they generally amounted to: "Dear ——. Sorry I can't come. Yrs." A reaction, no doubt, against her mother's habits of abundant correspondence with everybody she had ever met. As Elspeth wrote Mrs. Huncote looked at her, stimulated by this person in the act of writing, and vaguely wondered whether she would have time before leaving for church to start that letter to Mabel. She knew she would not, but she liked to play with the idea.

"Flora," she said, "I wish you'd find me the post-

56 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

office guide; I want to be quite sure when the mail leaves for Honolulu."

Flora gave her the book with a little smile. She knew quite well that her mother knew the date of the mail, had known it for weeks. But still, she treated the post-office guide, her mother's bible, with half respect.

In another few minutes, both in brown tweeds, both carrying sticks, brother and sister stepped out of St. Olaves at the smart heel and toe trot that Elspeth called walking. It was rather cold, and the fresh air stung a little red into Elspeth's pale cheeks. As soon as they had turned off the High Street, by the Red Lion, and passed through the dairy and the grounds of the home farm (now a laundry), they were in the country. For some time they did not speak; there was something delicious in the fresh, hard morning and the wet scent of dead leaves that seemed so old. It was not winter yet and the year sick to death, but rather the protest of summer holding up to St. Martin suppliant hands. And the wind, buoyant as a rosy sailor, urged them on. As they went down the path, deep-rutted by the carts, they could see the valley of the Char grow, opening like a pale green leafy cup and slowly rising in the south towards its guard of scattered pine trees, between which glowed the blue pearl of the sky. An exhilaration was in Huncote, as if he had escaped something. And the wonder of it was that Elspeth felt it too.

"Better than church," she said, with quick intuition.

He laughed, flung her a glad look: here was Elspeth, the companion, again with her shoving irony so like a young man, but more perceptive, so little like a young man.

"Rather," he said, and drew in a large breath.

There was a pause and Elspeth said:

"That was all rot, wasn't it? I mean what we were

talking about last night. You're not going to take orders, are you?"

"Of course I'm not," said Huncote, but this time without acidity. "If I were going to take orders I'd have started long ago. You've got it quite wrong about the Settlement, all of you."

"We were only chipping you," said Elspeth.

"I know, but under the chipping there was ignorance. There's nothing churchy about the Settlement; you can call us social reformers if you want to say anything offensive but, so far as I gather, what we're really up to is to try and civilise the people of England."

Elspeth laughed. "You talk as if we were Hottentots!"

Huncote paused for a moment to point with his stick towards the Char that wound, regular as a heraldic grey serpent, about the green meadows; then said:

"We are Hottentots in a way, only in a way; we've only got half the noble savagery and it isn't the noble half. I haven't been long in St. Panwich, but if you could only see what I've seen already . . ."

"We've got our own wife-beaters here," Elspeth interrupted.

"I don't mean wife-beating, or drunkenness, or thieving, or anything material," said Huncote reflectively. "I hardly know whether I can explain, Elspeth; it's an attitude, a sort of continual grab at food, and no wonder, for there doesn't seem to be enough of it to go round. But, what's much worse, there's a grab at more money than can buy food. It looks as if the only thing they could think about was more money for clothes, for trips to Margate, for picture palaces. A sort of heavy lack of understanding that the more you have of anything, things of that sort I mean, the heavier they lie on your stomach. It's materialism, that's what it is."

"Everything's material," said Elspeth.

"I know what you mean. In a way you're right. The emotion you get out of a steak-and-kidney pie is an emotion just like the one you get out of a Quentin Matsys. But there's a difference of grade. If you like to stay in the material field there's the difference between the silk purse and the sow's ear. Down there, in St. Panwich, it's sow's ears all the time. We want to wake them up to the silk purse."

Elspeth laughed.

"I see what you mean. Besides, I know, I've seen your little prospectuses: dances and pretty words and good pictures, and the Hundred Best Books."

"Hang it all!" said Huncote, a little exasperated, "isn't it better than foul words and the hundred worst murder trials?"

Elspeth shut her mouth rather tight, and for a minute or two they stepped smartly across the meadows and the bridge, known as Crumble Bridge because the boundary line of a parish ran through the middle of it, and one parish would not repair its half.

"I don't disagree with you," she said, "which doesn't mean that I agree. At the bottom I disagree very hard; I'm no democrat. The people want ruling, kindly but firmly, like horses. I'll refuse no horse a feed of oats, but I'll refuse him an over-feed."

"It's an under-feed you give them in St. Panwich," said Huncote, in a voice which surprised him, so bitter was it and so low-pitched. "Still, it's their business with their unions and all that to put that sort of thing right. What we've got to do in the Settlement is to try and make them decent, keep clean, use decent English, learn something that they don't get out of the papers, so that when they do come to the well-spread board they may not behave like pigs at a trough."

Elspeth did not reply; she was fond of Roger, and though she thought him ridiculously idealistic she was

not minded to interfere with him. She too, she reflected, had been like that. (She was quite wrong; she never had.) He would learn. When he had learnt he would do nothing without the advice of the C.O.S., and then everything would be all right. For a long time they did not speak, not indeed for a good quarter of an hour as, having gained the crest of the hill, they began to circle the valley. When at length Huncote spoke again it was not of the Settlement.

"I say, I don't think we'd better go down towards the lodge; we shall never be in by one if we do."

"Must get my six miles," replied Elspeth. "I feel like chewed string if I don't."

Huncote did not protest; he merely followed a little faster. He had long known Elspeth's energy, her care of her ruddy health for which walks alone were responsible, as she hated what she called the silly concentration of throwing balls about. Only later, as they turned towards home, did her silence begin to oppress him, and a mischievous impulse flashed to his mind. He thought of Trunch, and it occurred to him that Elspeth too had a skeleton.

"How's 'Erb?" he asked skilfully.

Elspeth's jaws came together rather sharply.

"Gone," she said.

Huncote looked at her sideways, much amused by the dark red flush which had sprung into her cheeks.

"He hasn't gone to St. Panwich, I suppose?" he asked. "If he has I'll have to rescue him, don't you think?"

"Don't be silly," Elspeth snarled, "I may have made a mistake; still very likely he had more to do with it than you think."

She looked so angry that Huncote caressingly took her by the arm.

"Don't be ratty," he said, but still he could not help teasing her. "Let me see," he said, "let's review the

60 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

facts. The young man known as 'Erb, aged 19, committed — adultery, that's the word, Elspeth, isn't it, in St. Olaves with — I've forgotten her name, who was a pearl of innocence, wasn't she?"

"Oh, don't talk nonsense!"

"And you solemnly warned him, didn't you, that he'd have to marry her, and he refused? And you told his employer to make him, and he ran away to London, let's hope to St. Panwich." Elspeth became statuesque in rigidity. "And I've just heard that this unfortunate victim was not only married, but more than married, and frequently married. Oh, Elspeth, is this true?"

His sister seemed about to make a vicious reply, then realised that he was only teasing her.

"I've half forgotten it," she said, "but still how could I know? It's generally the man's fault, isn't it?"

Huncote did not reply; he was still young enough to believe it was generally the man's fault, and that upset his argument.

"Well," he said, "I hardly know."

But already Elspeth was on him, hitting him again and again like a skilled boxer who has seen his adversary falter and rains blows on him so as to finish him.

"Of course it is the man's fault. What do I care who she was or what she was? As if that made any difference! As if he wasn't responsible for his own share of insult, whether he was the first or the last. They brought up that girl in ignorance, and they brought him up in knowledge. D'you call that fair? D'you call that an even match? And if it's an even match, who suffers, I'll ask you? 'Erb goes away to brag of what he has done, and she stays behind to weep for it. Why, even if she has done wrong she pays the price, and he gets the credit; somebody ought to serve 'Erb out, so as to make the balance fair."

This was what he liked in Elspeth: her virulence, her pugnacious energy, her hot championship of unworthy causes. She made him feel so reasonable, as if his intellect were like his hair, nicely parted in the middle. So more temperately he tried to discuss the 'Erb case, but they had not done with it when at last they entered the High Street from the other end. Elspeth had been too public-spirited, and she had been laughed at because it is so difficult to be public-spirited and ladylike. She was still very angry in the High Street, and it was quite a relief to come across Flora who had lagged behind her mother after church, ostensibly to buy stamps at the tobacconist's. Flora looked charming in a rather too vivid blue coat and skirt, with her fair hair pushed out with the pads of that year under a large black hat. She chattered to Huncote, having at once read in Elspeth's eye a fury not unfamiliar; the rector was getting stouter, it seemed, and, happy thought, his sermons shortened with his breath. Also Lady Alperton had a visitor staying with her, who looked like a soldier and — would you believe it, Elspeth? — the Belhus girls have come back all dressed alike. They always were two or three years behind the fashion, but I didn't think it was ten! And would Roger mind going into the tobacconist's with her because people mightn't know it was only stamps.

But all through the agreeable pretty chatter of the agreeable pretty voice Elspeth remained fiercely close as if offended, and Huncote was glad when that afternoon Flora, on the quite absurd plea of showing him a new autotype, took him to her bedroom. He let her chatter for a long time as she fluttered about, small and light, rather lazy, as one watches a butterfly over a flower bed. Flora's bedroom always amused him because it was always so entirely Flora. In a sense she was too pretty for the setting which she could conceive; something much more Greenaway would have suited her

fairness, those arched eyebrows over the half-naughty, half-childish grey eyes, the gay mouth, and the nose, small, impertinent, that invited together tolerance and censure. Roger always made her a little conscious of personal disorder, and so while she talked she tried to collect the many letters which lay about her writing pad. He smiled as he watched her, for he knew that among them were many tiny little compromising misdeeds. Indeed he had to chaff her.

"Is that one from Cuthbert?" he asked. "Or is his name Gerald? Sorry, but I get lost among your romances, Flora, so don't be offended if it happens to be Anthony."

She pretended to pout angrily, but she was delighted.

"Don't be ridiculous, Roger, you talk as if I'd a harem!"

"Haven't you? Now let me see, let's go back into ancient history."

"Roger!" cried Flora, half dismayed, "don't do that, it would —"

"It would take too long."

"You rude man! You seem to forget I'm only twenty."

"And experienced. There were four letters for you, Flora, this morning, and only one of them in a feminine hand."

"All bills," said Flora wearily.

"Not even one from Sawbones Junior?" asked Huncote.

Flora flushed. She had gone too far in her tiny intrigues. It was all very well exchanging countless letters with most of Roger's friends, and being more or less engaged to half her dancing partners, but Sawbones Junior, in other words the doctor's son, not favoured at the house, was a grievance. She did not care for the doctor's son — well, he was rather nice — but she might if they went on worrying her about him, and that would

be quite dreadful, she felt, for it would stop all the fun. So she said, very stately:

"I haven't seen him for a long time. One never does see anybody here, Roger," she added woefully. "There's simply nothing to do."

"Isn't there?" asked Huncote. "Why, whenever I'm down you never seem to have a minute, what with tennis, croquet, and acrostic teas!"

"Pooh!" said Flora disdainfully. "That's only passing the time away; that's not what I call having a good time. I had thought—" She stopped and looked melancholic.

"What had you thought?" asked Huncote, curious to know what desire lurked in that little brain.

"Oh, all sorts of things about you, Roger, you see. I didn't think you'd — you'd —"

"Go to the bad like this."

"I don't think you've gone to the bad or anything silly like that, only the other men I know — I thought you'd do something, Roger, and then — well, you'd have been about town, all that sort of thing."

"Oh," said Roger, "I understand, you mean I ought to have had a flat in St. James's, something smart though virtuous, where you could have come to stay now and then? And we could have gone to the theatre every night, with a different man on the other side of you, and to supper at Romano's."

Flora did not smile; she had a sense of humour, but her own affairs were too important to be laughed at.

"Yes," she said raptly; "wouldn't it have been lovely?"

Huncote had to laugh at the pretty seriousness.

"Never mind," he said, "you must come up now and then all the same and stay with me in Clare Street."

Flora looked at him dubiously.

"Of course I will. But tell me, are they dreadfully good at the Settlement?"

"I can't tell you yet," said Huncote, "but I'll enquire for the bad egg, and when you come up you and the bad egg and I, and somebody to keep me out of the way, shall visit the gilded haunts of vice in London."

"Don't be absurd!" Still she smiled and looked pleased as if the word "London" cheered her up. Flora hated St. Olaves and apart from her minor amorous correspondence lived only for those six weeks in the season which she, with her mother and Elspeth, passed every year at Black's Hotel. She did what she could: she collected china pigs, scores of them, on her mantelpiece; she filed all her theatre programmes, which she read on rainy days, in a large untidy drawer with many photographs, broken fans, and the ribbons from her underclothes which she seldom threw away because somehow she liked a mess.

Just before he left the room Huncote went up to his sister, took in his hand the pointed chin, and looked at her for a moment, humorously, compassionately, and a little disdainfully. She looked at him with a puckering smile on her lips and a rather arch look in her eyes as if she had to flirt even with her brother. And when he kissed her quickly on her plump round cheek she laughed and murmured:

"You really will let me come and stay, won't you?"

V

Huncote was thinking of all of them the next day as he went back to town. They blended together into a sort of patchwork quilt of family emotions: his mother's untidy, half-humorous charm, Elspeth's narrowness, and Flora's fluffy preoccupations; all these things seemed to correspond so ill with the life he was leading and wanted to lead. He was like a kitten that has escaped for a few days from its basket into the

world and judges its mother. Most marked was this attitude when he was in the Settlement itself. He returned there, it seemed, as directly as a pigeon, as if indeed it were home; he just took time to drop his bag in his frowsy rooms, for, of course, the landlady had kept the windows shut during the week-end; then he was in the St. Panwich High Street with jolly trams roaring on their way to Penton Town. Near a corner of the asphalted playground he could hear the Clare Street schoolchildren, and he liked the clatter of their little hobnailed boots. The Settlement opened before him, with its big white staircase so clean, and the long white-painted corridors that seemed monastic, with offices that might have been cells, lecture rooms where the chapter should have sat, for this was the St. Panwich Lay Settlement, with emphasis on the "Lay", an agnostic cloister. There was nothing ecclesiastic about its constitution, and indeed it rebelled so vigorously against the theistic idea that the clergy were only tolerated and then had to be balanced, when admitted, by clergy of other denominations: a sort of clerical chemistry, the Roman Catholic and the Presbyterian figuring like soda and sulphuric acid to neutralize each other. It was assumed that the result of the operation would be, if not beneficial, at least innocuous.

If Huncote had been fit to understand anything, which he was not yet (and if he had understood everything he would probably have done nothing, having learnt all that life has to teach), he would have seen that the Settlement, like most organisations, expressed itself in its secretary. He might have wondered whether the organisation moulded the man or the man the organisation, or whether secretaries were nominated in heaven. Certainly Churton, with whom he talked, represented the Settlement as if he had been conceived not in sin but in dedication. He was several years older than Huncote; he was a third-year man at

Gabriel when Huncote was a freshman, and in those days was a tall young man with the blackest hair and dark brown eyes, rather close-set and, like Huncote's, fanatical; but there was a quality of failure already in the long uneven sharpness of his enquiring nose. There was narrowness too in the sallow cheeks from which grew a very strong black beard that he shaved so close as to make them look green. In those days he intended to take orders, and why he never took orders, why he failed even to get a pass, why he was not pushed further on the clerical path, nobody knew. Possibly he had rebelled, for he had money, though very little; he had a hundred a year of his own, in fact he had been born with an electro-plated spoon in his mouth. Or very likely the Settlement had appealed to him because it satisfied some inner need for association with something organised. Churton respected organisation and had automatically become the servant of an organisation. It was open to question whether he would not have served equally well the Free Trade Union or the Tariff Reform League; one could imagine him faithful to any grouping, and indeed in any attitude save alone and palely loitering.

When Huncote came in Churton was at the telephone, the end of his long nose resting on the receiver. Huncote listened respectfully, looking at little things in the important office: files, account-books, scales, and punches, and the largest stone bottle of ink he had ever seen. Churton had given him a friendly nod, but he looked worried.

"I haven't made it clear," he telephoned worriedly. "Please let me explain again; it's my fault." There was a pause during which the person at the other end prevented him from explaining. "No, no," cried Churton, rather desperately, "it's against the constitution of the Settlement; we can't allow any intrusion — Oh! I didn't mean to put it like that, only I do want

to make it clear — our propaganda is not religious. Oh." A pause. "Then really I'm very sorry." Pause. "Certainly not" (rather acid this), "you've no right to say such a thing." There was another pause, and then the receiver came down rather sharply.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" said Churton, "this sort of thing happens every other day."

"What is it?" asked Huncote sympathetically.

"It's a nonconformist minister at the other end, and he wants to lecture to us on the cathedrals of Northern Spain, provided we allow him to use that as a text for an onslaught on Romanism, or was it Popery he called it?"

Huncote laughed at the woebegone dark face.

"It sounded as if you were saying no."

"I should rather think I was! What would our Irishmen say if I let the Christian pride of Highbury loose on them? You know, Huncote, sometimes I wish I'd gone into something definite, something with a really religious label. You know where you are, for everybody else is damned; but in our position, being kindly laymen, the only thing that seems to happen is that it's we who are damned because we have no special brand of salvation."

Huncote looked thoughtful for a moment.

"Yes," he said, "I see what you mean. You mean that every minister thinks this place must have a religion of some kind. They can't conceive undenominational good will, can they?"

"No," said Churton bitterly, "I've been here twelve months, and if I stay here five years it's Christian good will I'll begin to doubt."

Then the telephone rang again, and Churton was involved in a long argument with the printer who had set up a begging appeal from the wrong font. When Churton had done he returned to Huncote with a more busy and preoccupied air, as if commercial grace had

expelled the theological. They had to talk of the concert at which Huncote was to play that night. Before Churton could find the programme the boy came in to say that the architect was waiting with the scheme for the new east-side gullies. The architect was told to wait a moment. And when Churton found the programme and the name of the accompanist, so that Huncote might arrange with her what pieces he would play, there was another telephone call. Huncote's business was done, but he stayed some minutes in the office, every minute more admiring, for Churton seemed to have well in hand the reins of his organisation. People rang him up to ask at what time things happened, and he knew; he signed a number of cheques which the cashier laid before him, at the same time briskly discussing with the cook what substitute they should have that night for shrimp paste, as that had been vetoed by the Kitchen Committee on the ground of expense. He was marvellous, and every moment Huncote grew more humble.

Humility was still upon him a little later when lunching at Prince's with a man who had come down at the same time as he did, and the man's sister and mother. Huncote ought to have noticed the mat-whiteness of the girl and the purple shadows that made her eyes seem deep, so long were the curling eyelashes, but he was too excited by the vigour and capacity of the Settlement to which he had given himself. He knew he was being a bore, and yet he had to talk about it, about their programme, their building, and their hopes. They laughed at him, thought him very young and earnest; they liked him, they were vaguely amused and yet vaguely bored. But he hardly noticed, and even a little later, when he stood in Piccadilly Circus and saw crawling towards him the patchy colour of the motor-buses, like an undulating harlequin's robe, he was still in the thrall of this big living thing, the Settlement

which, his humour gone, he half-believed would regenerate the world.

That night the concert strengthened his enthusiasm; though it was very like any other concert it was the one he would always remember just because it was his first. He had a large mixed audience in the big lecture room; many women, a fair number of men, a rather rowdy, boot-scraping audience, an audience that grew more cheerful as time went on and clapped each piece with perfect impartiality and some violence. It was with a beating heart that Huncote played his two pieces, carefully selected with the inevitable Churton's concurrence: "Thais" in the first part and, in the second, a berceuse. He was not nervous, for he had played before to amateur audiences, but he cared most for what he saw when he was not playing, when he was less consciously linked with these people. One thing he knew: he liked them, liked them quite violently, all of them; he liked the old women in their bonnets, the men who sprawled against the back wall as much as the men who sat at attention in the front row (where they had been put by force). And most of all he liked the absence of any clerical influence; there was no address and no collection; there were no texts upon the wall, unless a quotation from Ruskin and another from William Morris served as such. At the end the chairman's speech and the votes of thanks just avoided the danger. The seconder of the vote of thanks was a clergyman who did make one slightly unfortunate allusion in his expressions of gratitude, for he extended them a little beyond the performers, but apparently the audience did not mind.

It was indeed a fine jolly audience, Huncote found, when he came to know it a little better after the concert, and tea and coffee were served in the refectory behind. He was determined to be easy, he was determined to help; he resolutely talked to two of the men, for he was

afraid of the girls who sat in clumps, far from the men, and nudged each other and looked at him and tittered. The men embarrassed him a little less, but they carried with them the smells of their trades, smells of metal and leather mixed with sweat; one man he liked, but the other, whom Huncote innocently thought he had picked but who had in reality picked him, was Joe Beesby. Joe Beesby was very short, extremely fat, and upon his round, bald head had erected a cap which would have fitted a little boy of six; he maintained an intense gravity due to small eyes which never moved from the victim they fascinated, which was a pity, as Beesby had a grievance. It was a complicated grievance. His eldest son had been arrested on a charge of which he was acquitted after two months' preventive detention. During that time his tools were kept at the police station. On the day he came out young Beesby, forgetting all about his tools, celebrated the occasion by getting so drunk that he was sentenced to fourteen days or a fine of two pounds. Then he remembered his tools.

"So wot did 'e do, sir? 'E said to the beak, 'Wot abaht me tools?' 'e said. 'You gi' me back me tools, and I giv yer yer two pouns.' An' wot d'yer think the beak said? 'You giv me me two pouns first.' When 'e come out o' quod the tools was rusted, done for." Beesby's eyes grew as keen as drills. He argued his son's case, then the beak's case. He became pathetic. "I arsk yer, sir, d'yer call it fair?"

Huncote got very involved in this conversation, for he could not discover whether the tools had been accepted as security by the relentless beak. Moreover, Beesby had not the slightest intention of telling the story except in the way he chose, and it went on interminably; it went on as to what the beak had said, and what that dirty tyke, the sergeant, had said, and what young Beesby had said (and him not accountable after

going on the booze). Huncote found himself growing quite hot as the Beesby drama slowly extended, qualified, parenthetical, reminiscent, discursive, into a full account of the accident to Beesby's uncle John when he tried to get a bath up the stairs. Huncote was not yet used to talking to the class that he wanted to raise. Still he had to talk to Beesby; everybody at the Settlement had to listen to the Beesby story once (and, if one was not careful, more often). And so the evening wore on; he talked to many other people, to young men who were aggressively friendly and who nearly dug him in the waistcoat to show him that this was democracy and they were all pals, also to young men who called him "sir" and grew very hot about the ears when he looked at them, because they could not realise that this was democracy and they were all pals. There were women too who flitted about him trying to smooth the helper's path, some little hard-knit persons with mouths like purse fasteners, and a rather tall, gracious dark girl, called Miss Underwood, he thought, whom he liked to see with several fat girls from the pickle factory around her, looking rather lost and vaguely ironic.

He was not very conscious of anybody individually, but rather of talk that began in a buzz and rose to a rumble, ending in a roar and mixed continually with the rattle of teacups and the clink of spoons, a rather confused impression of everything being too hot and dusty, but still wonderfully pleasing. When at last he regained Clare Street and his bed, a bed which would have interested St. Lawrence, he was glowing all over with some inner satisfaction; he had been close to the poor and almost had found them fair.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

THE WINGS OF UTOPIA

I

Two months had elapsed. It was January. By turning his head a little Huncote could see through the window the light fall of snow which had suddenly etherealised the grim little houses in the side street. Here was silence absolute, as if indeed this were the Arctic, and in the St. Panwich High Street the rising and falling rumble of the trams. For a time he watched the lost snowflakes falling and thought, with a half smile, of Blake, of the mystic swans in the far blue shaking their fleecy wings. He was not unhappy in the melancholic day, for was he not here, all alone, in a bright office? A Helper? Established? Was he not performing a function? Would there not be a hitch in the social machine for a second perhaps, but still a second, if he were to disappear? He bit his pen, pushing aside the exceedingly greasy testimonials which lay before him, as if the silent snow made him reflective. There had been changes in these two months; he had, it seemed, understood the Settlement quite well, its desire, by song, dance, lecture, to civilise the people, to humanise them a little by offering them some pleasure other than drink and lust. Also he had given it all his time, and so he had risen in the lay-order until now he was a sort of extension of the organised Churton, able to draw out an appeal, to select music, and even to cope with the unpleasant Mrs. Bubwith in the High Street where chairs were now and then hired. The great machine of paper, tea (or coffee), and good intentions moved readily

enough under his hand. He even knew the way along the corridors, could, when he wanted, find the lecture secretary, the lantern-slide room, the envelope-addressing hall, the various activities that flitted about the social surface like water-spiders on a pool. Yes, he was doing something, brightening the world; this was life, this was the life. He bent down once more to the testimonials; he rang a bell and a little lay-acolyte, whom in his mind he called "face of a thousand pimples", showed in one of his visitors.

It was Old Gartly, some time a master plumber, now Old Gartly, a jobbing plumber. Huncote had not yet learnt to speak first, so Old Gartly was on him protesting that he was entirely sober, had always been sober.

"Only," he said, "one can't get no more work."

Huncote looked at him, rather embarrassed: the old man was sixty or so, and the worst of it was that he had been a master in a small way: the ranks of industry reject those who once were commissioned.

"Yes," he said, rather doubtfully, "it would be rather difficult to get you into a shop."

"It ain't as if I 'adn't always been sober," Old Gartly obstinately went on. "Most o' the chaps what goes wrong does it all along the drink. Now, sir, I've always kep' mesel' respectable, I've always kep' mesel' sober . . ."

He unwound endlessly the record of his sobriety. Huncote suddenly stared at him. Somehow he suspected the man's sobriety: he did not yet know the respectable type of artisan to which Old Gartly belonged, who has kept himself sober, abominably and painfully sober in the face of his desire, and who flies the flag of martyrdom. Old Gartly had been quite, quite sober, and he was so powerfully conscious of it that Huncote thought he was drunk. "But," he thought, "I mustn't let that influence me. I'm not here to judge but to help."

So, unjust and well-meaning, he cut through the old man's protestations, noted what jobbing he could do, originated the brilliant idea of printing circulars for him which he could distribute himself all round his own district and then sent him away. He rang the bell for the acolyte, smiling half-sorrowfully at Old Gartly who had put his head in again to ask whether he had put "teetotaler" on the circulars.

The morning passed on, varied and yet much the same, for all cases, though different in detail, were of the same type. He promised a seamstress to redeem her sewing-machine, and as she had been ill, appointed her to look after his linen which, after two months with the local laundry and the Clare Street landlady, was making urgent charity of some kind. He promised an enterprising youth to find out how he could become president of the Institute of Mining Engineers and secured him for the night classes on electricity. Churton ran in for a moment, alert and paper-laden, dragging a portly woman who apparently wanted employment in the intervals of having babies, who happened often. But Huncote was not very successful here, because maternity had become an obsession in this case; her statement developed by degrees into a dirge on the fate of women who generally have twins and might, if fate were unkind, prove yet more prolific. It was queer and interesting, this employment business; every case seemed to show him something more of the complications of a social system into which he had been thrown without ever having been told why it had been created or how. He was meeting mainly the unemployable, those who were not strong enough and those who were too old, and it occurred to him now and then to wonder why society would neither kill these people nor feed them. Use them it could not except at its own terms, which meant such terms as would by under-cutting slowly reduce the employable to the unemployable level.

It was depressing in a way, this procession of the forgotten, so anxious all of them to maintain life not for their own pleasure, but as a sort of offertory to the instinct of self-preservation.

It was a heavy morning: he had seen many people, heard many rambling conversations out of which uncles, aunts, and stomachic disturbances could not be kept. His machine had rumbled on, creaking; he had done something, and he glowed, for it did not yet strike him that he would have to do the same something again to-morrow, and yet again. He stretched himself, he felt pleased; he thought he would lunch at his club.

Such a quick change, this run in the tube from St. Panwich to Piccadilly. Somehow of late he had not liked Piccadilly; it made him remorseful, and he was not quite sure that it would not be a good thing if one could blow up Piccadilly: he had not yet thought of blowing up St. Panwich. But now he liked going to his club, for during the last week he had watched over Toy, one of his good works. Toy was a waiter who one day appeared at the Settlement with a rambling tale of stewardships on steamboats and of gallantry in the South African War. He was proud of a suit of evening clothes pea-green at the seams. He was wonderfully voluble, and most of his references had been lost in the wreck of a steamer which was sometimes the *Orontes* and sometimes the *Omara*. Huncote was half-amused, half-sceptical. He did not quite know what to do with a waiter whose accent was neither German nor Italian. He half thought of handing him over to Miss Miskin who had nothing to do just then. Miss Miskin was not favourable.

"You're the employment agent," she said acidly. "You don't want me to set him to needlework, do you?"

Huncote mumbled something about work at private

dinners, for Miss Miskin was a rich old maid, frequenting the bulky dinners of city friends.

"Pooh!" said Miss Miskin, and added various sounds that were neither civil nor kind; looking more than usual like a hysterical wet lizard she left him the care of Toy. And Toy, who has large cheeks and thin legs, red hair, a watery eye, and something of the bedside manner of a fashionable doctor broadened by the barrack-room, began siege operations on Huncote's room. He appeared every morning regularly, always carrying his evening clothes in a brown-paper parcel, inclined to expose the scandalous way in which other soldiers had behaved in Kaffir kraals; every moment he threatened to show Huncote the excellent evening clothes. In the end Huncote found him a place in the kitchen of his club. So he liked to go down now and then and ask the steward how the good work was progressing.

He did. But Toy was to count no more in the kitchen of the august club; he was always sober in the morning but not so, the club found, at night; in an unfortunate fit of exultation he had poured half a pound of sugar instead of salt into the soup.

II

Huncote was almost blind to the implications of this work, blind to the endlessness of it. Indeed now and then he was inflamed by the idea of linking material advantage with mental progress. These men and women who came in, asking him to help them, were not lost. They found, he thought, a sort of home in the Settlement; they took with their job such culture as it could give them of nights. Now and then he had a vision of St. Panwich Lay Settlement as a beneficent mother hanging over the people, a comforter promising them better things than even it gave them. But he was

discovering other factors, exterior movements that competed with the Settlement as if they grudged it the relief of misery because it did not relieve in what the other movements considered the right way. There seemed especially to be continual friction between the Settlement and the clerical organisations of St. Panwich. Once upon a time there had been a war between the local vicars and the intruding agnostics; that was over, but now and then a sort of guerilla warfare sprang up; there were allusions in the parish magazine to the superiority of faith over works; a few powerful churches had also a way of selecting rather late for their entertainments the same nights as those of the Settlement and then seducing a part of the Settlement audiences by getting their entertainments deeply intertwined with the coal and blanket clubs. There was also Lady Govan's Education League with which relations were exceedingly complicated, because Mr. Platt, of the Temple Club, was a member of the Settlement Committee, and made it his aim in life to become Liberal member for St. Panwich in succession to the Unionist, Sir Henry Govan. And Lady Govan was quite formidable: it was not that she did everything that was necessary; she did everything that was necessary and hundreds of things which were not: these advertised her league most destructively by compare with the milder activities of the Settlement.

Huncote was still too young and inexperienced to be tempted into these deeper politics, but hints had fallen in conversation from Platt, from Churton himself. Indeed the only man who never laid stress upon these mysteries of altruistic competition was the Reverend William Ford. Huncote might never have come across Ford had it not been for these complicated competitions. But towards the end of June a free advertisement was given Ford by Pastor Walkley, known as the great exhorter, who had come over from Australia to wrestle

for St. Panwick's soul. Huncote accidentally drifted into the chapel where the pastor was received as he went on some Settlement business close by. He spent about a quarter of an hour in the crowded long hall which was packed, gangways and all, by a dark crowd quietly moved to intensity; one could hear it breathe, and it seemed to rise a little towards the orator's periods. Pastor Walkley was a tall, large man, the typical "elder", with tufts of white hair brushed straight away from his head over his ears, a large untrimmed beard, and a shaven upper lip that seemed immensely long under the wide pugnacious nose. The pastor had the largest blue eyes, that looked rather as if they had been boiled, and he talked endlessly of the thunders of the Bible, stains and dishonours, and hells and defilements; he boomed on drink and eternal torture . . .

But what struck Huncote was that he had picked out for special attack the Reverend William Ford, who with his boxing class, it seemed, was the pillar of brutality in the district, who spat upon the steps of the Temple of the Lord. Then Huncote realised that he had not visited every section of the Settlement. He had heard of William Ford, the Fighting Parson, or Fighting Bill, but he had never seen him at work.

And a great voice boomed from the pulpit denunciations of mortal sin, threatenings of everlasting agony, begging his audience, ere it was too late, to come "intoe the boosum of A-Bra-Ham." It followed him, he thought, right into the street. It seemed to drive him out into the night of beer and blood that is London. There was no fear in Roger Huncote, and because there was no fear Pastor Walkley could not save him, could not draw him shrinking and reluctant "intoe the Boosum of A-Bra-Ham."

Far from it. As if the pastor by denouncing it had advertised sin he drove Huncote straight on to the Set-

tlement, where fortunately the Fighting Parson was having his night.

He was a blot on the Settlement in a way; the egg of a religious cuckoo in an agnostic nest. But then, through wanting to, or perhaps because it had opened its doors to him, Fighting Bill had punched and smacked his way in as if conscious that in this lay fold were young souls whom it was his mission to bring to God by sashes in the jaw. Besides it had been almost impossible to do without him, for he had become too popular in St. Panwich. He was about twenty-six, fair, curly-headed, blue-eyed; with his pink cheeks and white skin he looked like a jolly Irish boy. Married at twenty-two he was then additional curate to the rector of St. Panwich, had four children, a small wife, and a colossal appetite. For about two months St. Panwich did not notice him; it had vaguely observed that where the parson went there was less groaning and intoning than usual, but a good deal of boisterous laughter. It might not have mattered much: St. Panwich was too busy keeping alive to bother about foreign princes and parsons, and other lunatics, only one night, outside a public house, two men in railwaymen's uniforms, who had had just enough and were preparing to go in to have a little more, glared at him. One of them remarked: "Hullo, sky-pilot! At the earhole again?"

The Reverend William Ford knew the slums and their language; he at once took in the idiotic insinuation that he would report them to the company unless they stood him a drink or otherwise bribed him. Something inside him grew bulky; still, he tried to remember that he was a man of God.

"Don't be silly," he said. "You don't think I'd give a man away!"

The words were too mild; his tormentor nudged his companion. "See him turn the other cheek, matey? Shall I spit in his eye or will you?"

80 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

The thing inside the Reverend William grew unbearably large. Instead of walking away lest he should be defiled he came a little nearer. Then a dreadful thing happened, for almost simultaneously the second man attempted to spit into the Reverend William's eye while a most untended and unclerical red fist struck him straight in the mouth. This was the beginning of Fighting Bill's first row. It was a gorgeous and wonderful row, for the railwayman was game and for three or four minutes fought well, getting in a nasty one over Ford's left eyebrow that cut it right open. But crusading blood was up. Ford danced about from right to left foot, sparring, looking like a wild crow. He rushed into his opponent's guard, broke it down, completely bunged up one of his eyes, and on recovering clinched in characteristic style, finishing him off at last with a most scientific uppercut. He fought in a sort of mist, conscious of a growing crowd around him that filled the little side street, and of muffled roars of: "Go it, little 'un!" and "Kill him, Parson!" Nor did he recover when they picked up his adversary, for the first of his opponents was still in his mind, and he was the only thing he could see, the thing he unerringly picked out of the crowd and went for like a mad bull. There were protests; two men tried to hold him.

"That'll do, Parson, you've done enough."

Then a horrible thing happened. Fighting Bill whirled them away, roaring: "Go to hell!" and leapt on the one they were trying to protect. This proved a still easier job than the other, for it seemed that the powers of the devil, suddenly invoked, joined the gentler ones in the body of Fighting Bill. He had the other man down at the first blow, which by fortune rather than by skill landed on the point. And with true Christian charity the Reverend William helped his opponent up so as to be able to knock him down again. . . .

Fighting Bill walked off famous. The police arrived upon the scene thirty seconds after he left the side street with his handkerchief to his eyebrow, and the crowd refused to give him away. Somebody told the police that the unfortunate men had been set upon by four roughs, which, judging from their condition, was quite possible. The story did get about a little later, and the rector noticed that his additional curate had fallen down-stairs and hurt his forehead. The police did nothing, but henceforth had a smile and a salute for the new Knight Templar.

The trouble was that the one who had once been Mr. Ford and swiftly became the Reverend Bill, and within his club merely "Bill", was now a celebrity. He had to live up to his celebrity, and as nobody believed he was in earnest about anything unless he hit them — well, he did hit them. He found the taste growing on him; he hung about the worst parts of St. Panwich (they were mostly worst), looking for adventure near the public houses. He found it often and made a point of celebrating his victory by compelling his victims to attend the services he took. There, in his sermons, he made painful and public allusions to their features and their temperaments. He cured a wife-beater after three applications of his particular medicine. For one moment the breath of scandal nearly touched him after his defeat of Posky Joe, the American bully.

No sooner had Ford driven Posky out of the district than the girl on whose earnings he lived developed for Fighting Bill an entirely hopeless passion; he handed her over to Mrs. Ford who reformed her morals. Unable to attain Fighting Bill the girl attained goodness: she was seen a little later with her hair drawn up from her forehead and an unpowdered nose. But at last ecclesiastic power interfered. Fighting Bill, who was already a suspect because he was a high-churchman, a socialist, and

a lover of beer, was called upon to become mild and broad.

"Street fights!" said the rector. "Disgraceful!"

Finally he threatened to report him to the bishop. And the Reverend Bill, who had learnt to love his enemies while he knocked them into the gutter, first apologised and then evolved the theory that salvation could be earned by apostolic blows and knocks. So to use up his energy he started the boxing class. As his idea was in a way the same as that of the Settlement, and as the Settlement boys advertised Fighting Bill in every corridor by emulating his evangelical practices, he was seduced into the lay fold by the offer of a room and a ring. It appealed to him; the Settlement was in his view no better than hell, but he felt it was his duty to knock Satan out, and he was not sure that in paradise he could hope to get on with anybody except perhaps St. George. Fighting Bill was wrong about the Settlement being hell; it was more like Laodicea. Still, Laodicea, devoid of spiritual aims, had worldly ones, and so came about the queer alliance. The Settlement used Fighting Bill's mystic fisticuffs to get in the boys whom it entangled into technical classes, while the curate slyly worked to get them to come to the Communion table before breakfast. (He was often successful in this, as in St. Panwich many did not have breakfast.)

Huncote stood for a moment near the door of the big room, made shy by novelty. It was very dark except in the middle. All along the walls were forms, packed with youths, some with cigarettes, a shoving, chattering mass. Few smoked, for nobody under eighteen was allowed tobacco. Fighting Bill had settled that. "If I see you with a fag in your mouth before you're eighteen," he remarked, in general, "I'll give you a thick ear." Smoking became unfashionable.

It was the middle of the scene that struck and impressed Huncote. Between the white ropes upon the floor that glittered under the hard white light of the big gas lamps stood two youths, stripped to the waist, with clumsy, gloved hands and quick live bodies. They ducked, they feinted, they retreated, and then smack, smack, a good double body blow.

A voice said: "That's nice."

The youth who had been hit recovered, dodged, and now he was upon his antagonist, striking, missing, then striking again, driving him into the ropes.

Huncote grew conscious of the referee, a burly, middle-sized figure in clerical clothes, a figure that ran around the contestants, that thrust itself between them with an angry cry of "Break!" when they clinched. And for a moment, as the figure did not interfere, Huncote saw him and envied him, flushed, smiling sideways with a bulldog pipe stuck in the corner of his mouth: Ford at work!

Huncote watched for a long time to the end of this contest which was to be followed by the boxing class, when the curate took ten youths together, the rawest beginners those, showing them where to place their feet, walking rapidly up and down the line to correct their guard. And he enjoyed the big voice that shouted to one of the softies: "That's no good. You're not catching flies, are you?"

Ford picked a more promising one and stood up to him to be hit. Smack came the boxing-glove between Ford's eyes. "Not a bit of good!" Smack again, a little louder. "Didn't feel it!" And so on until the exasperated youth drew from his thin arm enough strength to make the parson reel.

Huncote was oppressed too by the continuous sound from the end of the room that came from the punching ball on which Ford's favourite heavyweight was practising. When at last it was over, about an hour and a

half later, the curate closed the proceedings with a short speech:

"Boys, you know where to find me again if you want to see me before next Wednesday." (Wink. This was forbidden at the Settlement.) "You know where we can have a straight talk, you and me." (Shouts of "Yes, sir!") "Well, that's all right. Good-by, and don't practise what you've learnt on your mother!" (Roars of merriment.)

Then Ford shouted: "Who's for a drink?"

He collected the three who were over twenty-one, for beer was forbidden by him under that age, the penalty being the same as for smoking when under eighteen. As the party broke up he saw Huncote whom he knew by sight.

"Join us?" he said cheerfully.

Huncote hesitated. He was vaguely afraid of following Fighting Bill and his young friends into the public house. The Reverend William felt it. "No?" he said. "Well, see you another night; we can have a chat." And he passed on with his disciples, a crowd of smaller boys eligible only for gym following respectfully a few yards behind, escorting the giant to the place where he would refresh himself. As they passed and Huncote waited, he heard the beginning of an argument as to whether Bill was as good as Gunner Moir. After the room had emptied he went out into the corridor that seemed so cold without anything living in it. Those half dozen words with Fighting Bill had shaken him a little; the parson seemed so alive and zestful as he knocked loafers into heaven. Huncote felt apart, as if he belonged to some inhuman system. Ford and his friends seemed to have taken warmth with them. He sighed; but what was one to do? And suddenly there came upon him the feeling that after all Ford was being used for the purposes of the Settlement, was contributing to its power, bringing through apparent

brutality all these boys nearer to culture and to education. It was not his business to follow them into public houses; his rather to sow the field which Ford ploughed. Still, it had been dusty in there; he felt thirsty.

"I'd better go and have a drink at the Progress Arms," he thought.

III

It was just round the corner to the Progress Arms, as it always is to public houses, except that the Progress Arms was not exactly a public house. It was a large white room with a monastic air; a hint of cheerfulness in its disordered benches; an accumulating hint of æsthetic developments about the Kingsley and John Morley texts upon the wall. This den of Janus showed the face of improvement by the side of the face of the drinking hell. (The alliance between the sheep and the goat; and could they cross?) On the improvement side were four newspapers, the *Daily Express*, the *Daily News*, the *Daily Chronicle*, and the *Daily Citizen*. This congress of political oppositions had created in the bosom of the Committee a fine sense of open-mindedness, because each member objected to at least two out of the four papers. On the improvement side also, on a shelf, were some Really Good Books, the titles of which Huncote could not see; but he was haunted the whole evening by one of them, which lay on the floor,—*The Pleasures of Life* by Sir John Lubbock. It looked as if it had been flung there with great violence by one of the revellers.

On the drinking hell side were the bar, two gas-jets, and a barmaid. The bar and gas-jets were quite normal, but the barmaid was such as to deliver man from evil. Lastly, there was the gambling den: marble-topped tables, draughts, chess, and dominoes. When

86 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

Huncote came in the dominoes were engaging two rather depressed-looking revellers, while another, whose cocoa seemed to have gone to his head, was addressing confidential, but presumably progressive remarks to the resistible barmaid. There was a little stir when Huncote came in, even among the dominoes. The man at the bar straightened himself and respectfully wished him: "Good evening." The barmaid grew very conscious of being looked at, which she wasn't.

"A cup of cocoa, please," said Huncote, and in the silence that followed felt impelled to add to the roomful: "Go on, don't mind me." For he acutely felt that they were minding him. But little by little things seemed to grow easier; two youths came in and in a very far corner began behind a chess-board to play some peculiar game of their own with a metallic tinkle about it. Huncote suspected it must be shove halfpenny, strictly forbidden. But what was one to do? He engaged in conversation the man at the bar and the barmaid.

"Rather a fine night," he said.

"Yes, sir," said the man. "Let's hope it'll keep on."

"A little rain'll do the country good," said the barmaid refinedly.

The man at the bar opened his mouth to say: "Shut yer mug, the country don't want no rain in January," but just in time altered it to: "We can't always 'ave what we want in this world."

"Ah, no," sighed the barmaid. "Isn't that true, sir? Still we mustn't grumble, must we, sir? Every cloud has a silver lining."

"That depends, that depends," said the man discontentedly.

His nose was so long and so thin and so sharp that Huncote felt sorry for him. Whatever happened one would never be contented with a nose like that.

"That depends," said the man, looking at him.

"For instance, there's my eldest boy,— I can't manage him. Manage that boy? Well, yer might as well try and manage a bl—, a blessed wild horse. Now I put it to yer, sir, as man to man I put it to yer, sir . . ."

As man to man he put it to him that Fred broke windows, and played truant, and stole pennies from the till, "regular bad boy." He put it to Huncote as man to man, and then he put it to him again. And again.

"Well," said Huncote, "what's to be done? What have you done? I s'pose you've tried thrashing?"

The man looked shamefaced and his nose chastened.

"On principle, sir, I wouldn't do it, but what's a man to do? I've given him many a leatherin' but it's no bl—, no use, sir. I've got to get him into a reformatory. Ah, if I could do that . . ."

"How sad," murmured the barmaid gently.

The man began to paint the reformatory of his dreams, where Fred would be washed, and taught, and got out of the way of the beak, where at least, if Fred did not cease troubling, his father would be at rest.

"And the beak won't send 'im there," he said aggrievedly. "I don't know what 'e's waiting for. Murder, I expect."

Joe Beesby came in. "The beak!" he grumbled. "Cup o' corfee, Miss, please. The beak! Good evening, sir, I was tellin' you about 'im the other night."

"Yes, you were," said Huncote desperately, remembering the story of the tools. So he turned towards the long thin nose.

"We ought to get him into an industrial school," he said.

Joe Beesby woke up. He felt somebody was going to get something. This would never do.

"Sir," he said sorrowfully, fascinating Huncote with his grave small eye, "I've got a crippled daughter, I've been trying to get 'er in a 'ome. It's been my ambition for years." He paused and reverently took from his

bald head the little boy's cap. Then he wiped his head with his sleeve. The long nose grew anxious.

"D'yer think yer cud get 'im into an industrial school, sir?"

Joe Beesby said. "If *you* was to speak to Mr. Churton, sir, about my daughter . . ."

"Now I put it to yer as . . ." said the long thin nose.

Two more men came in and settled opposite Huncote, so that he was blockaded between Beesby and the thin nose. They endlessly explained their troubles, begged for the remedies which apparently he held in his hands. It was like a scene on the stage, with the gas sputtering above his head, and the barmaid looking at him raptly, thinking he did talk beautiful.

It was a long time, he thought, before he escaped, before he got out of the Progress Arms, leaving behind him the parents who talked of getting their children into the reformatory and the cripples' home as awed as if they were going to get them into Parliament. He was uneasy. It was not that people troubled him, not Beesby nor the anonymous nose. But there was creeping upon him a suspicion as to the quality of his own work. And so he did not go home straight, but found himself walking down past Bubwith's, cutting across Somerton towards Euston. It was very dark in Somerton, except at corners where they sold drink. As he went he thought: "After the flood Deucalion, to make new men, flung behind him his grandmother's bones. What is it I fling that slaves should arise behind me?"

In the grip of this reaction he stopped at a flaming public house, at the corner of the alley that leads into Paradise Square. It was twelve o'clock and, spurred on by the clock that is always a little fast, the men in the public bar were shouldering one another. One could hardly hear oneself order a drink, such a deep buzz of talk did there come from the private bar and the

ladies'. For a moment the barmaid hovered over Huncote, turkey-cock body and torch ahead. She winked at him as she gave him his whisky and soda, thought him green, for this drink seemed aristocratic in the public bar. For a moment she rested on her elbow and stared at him. Then as he raised his glass remarked: "Chin-chin."

He laughed, feeling together shy and comfortable.

Two men who were close up against him nudged each other and laughed at him, with him. They were not quite drunk. "She didn't 'arf give 'im the glad eye," murmured one of them, nodding towards Huncote as he spoke. "No wonner he thinks hisself a Piccadilly torf." He was not offensive. He laughed as he spoke, and somehow Huncote found himself joined to him by his merriment.

In a few moments he was talking to them. One was a navvy, the other a taxi driver. It was a strange conversation for, starting from their daily work, it passed on swiftly to the political views of their class, to ideas.

"You've got to 'ave unemployment," said the navvy. "'Ow'd yer manage w'en there's a rush if there weren't no unemployed?"

The taxi driver nodded sagely. "You've got it, but it'll all be stopped w'en we get the Right to Work Bill. Another mouthful of Guinness's, Miss, an' keep yer eye orf youth and beauty." (Nodding towards Huncote.)

The taxi driver and the navvy fell to discussing the Right to Work Bill, and Huncote, listening, saying "yes" or "no" when appealed to as a sort of judge, found it extraordinary that these men should understand so well without, of course, being able to state in political form what they thought, the reactions between the supply and the demand of goods, the reserve of labour, a thing of which he was himself but dimly conscious. Had he underrated the people? He felt ashamed. The two men began to wrangle, for the taxi

90 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

driver wanted women to be placed on the same footing as men. The navvy objected, presumably because women might cut into the navvy trade. "All right for you to talk," he said; "women won't drive your bloody taxi."

Huncote intervened; asked the taxi driver if he was a socialist. Both men grew violent. They weren't no blasted socialists, either on 'em, they were just plain men who kept their eyes open, that's what they were.

Then, when their political attitude was defined, extreme anarchism which thought itself conservative, Huncote was given a drink.

He was thinking a little more clearly as he walked home through the brilliant winter-whiteness of the waning night. He did not want to go home to his dirty little rooms in Clare Street, the sitting room where the landlady would have let out the fire long ago, the bedroom where, if the window was open, which he hoped, the washstand would probably be covered with a thin film of smuts. Through Paradise Row and Crapp's Lane, Crapp's Lane that winds, by day violent of voice and of nights so little and so still, towards the north he went, with nothing to accompany him save his thoughts. And nothing to distract him. The world seemed so far away when asleep, and so little remained of the world of day; the smell of rotting vegetables fallen from the costers' stalls; the padding of a cat's paws as it leapt from a window onto the pavement; the distant lowing of a cow in that insanitary shed that Miss Misken so often denounced. Only details in a life that every day grew wider. He thought of all these organisations eddying round him, of the brotherhoods and the P.S.A.'s; of the clerk, the coster, the small tradesman, the silk-hatted coronations of men who were rising in the world,—and even a little uneasily of Fighting Bill and what he represented. If the Progress Arms meant too little and that public house where he had just drunk

meant nothing, perhaps Fighting Bill meant too much. So like a dog running fast after a stone, and so fast as to overrun it. Even Fighting Bill seemed artificial in this icy blue light that fell from the moon and made blacker shadows upon black stones, as if the earth were dead and another Selene. He laughed. A new Selene. And Fighting Bill's Sunday meetings where gentlemen probably doffed their collars and wore chokers to encourage men who either never wore collars or never changed them. It seemed so funny and so unreal, this business he was at with the others. He turned back, and as he so did he sighed. For a little while he stopped in front of Bubwith's Stores, now shuttered. Chairs and tables, horsehair and plush, yes, that was all solid enough. Anyhow, one could sit on it. He sighed.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

WAVERING WINGS

I

It was fortunate for Huncote that his work tended to change, that Churton, as if by intention, often suggested new fields. For otherwise he would have been lonely. There were no Londoners in his family; on both sides they were country people, most of whom shunned the wicked city; the nearer folk at St. Olaves came up only six weeks in the year because once upon a time they had come up six weeks in the year. And, as at Oxford, he made few new friends. He saw Gorsley in the intervals of the fat youth's bounds up the ladder of success. (This was taking the form of a year's cramming for the Indian Civil.) Churton gave him little: some conversation about the Settlement which Churton seemed to look upon as a relief from the work; his society on aimless walks before dinner in which he confided nothing of his thoughts and everything of his observations. Ditton he met casually with the hateful sense of being ashamed: Ditton was a witness. Huncote felt very red-eared after the few minutes' talk they had outside a tube station; as Ditton looked at him Huncote felt heavy upon him the oppression of the man who knew that he had been drunk and incontinent. He was wrong; Ditton knew nothing of the end except that he had vanished with Wray, and Lord Alastair was far too drunk to remember what had happened. So Huncote as good as ran away and seldom thought of his companions on that evil, beneficent, revealing night, except sometimes of Moss, with whom he would like

to have pursued that conversation about Bach. But he dared not go to Copthall Buildings; Moss was part of the past that made him, and past. Huncote was like a kitten that knows not its mother after six months.

He had abandoned the employment bureau now and was engaged on an attempt, initiated by Platt, to Raise the Artistic Status of the People. Platt, who belonged to the Temple Club (and was bald and a Liberal), had determined to harness to the chariot of his political career the principles of the Kyrle Society. One had to give the people the habit of pictures, "for every picture tells a story," Platt suggested. And so, if one began by hanging the people's rooms with reproductions of "The Golden Staircase", or of "Dante's First Meeting with Beatrice", one might, little by little, by inducing them to accept other pictures of the same nature, bring them to hang pictures, artistic of course, most artistic, but reading a truer party lesson. Pictures of Mr. Gladstone, for instance.

Also he was dutifully visiting the Progress Arms once a week, and now and then he played at concerts. His past troubled him a little, those people he had befriended and, notably, the woman who had the frequent twins. For affection had developed in her, and so she would come in now and then, when he still controlled the Employment Bureau, and detect in his face symptoms of disease.

"You're lookin' a bit pale, Mister 'Uncote. I been like that. It's wisteria, the doctor says it is; I know, I've 'ad it."

Huncote reassured her as to his hysteria. But if he was not pale he was sallow, and when noticed was told:

"That's jaundice, sir; I know, I've 'ad it."

Huncote's protégée would have been appreciated by the curator of the College of Surgeons' Museum.

There was a Purity for Boys movement too. But that was to lead him farther.

94 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

There were disconnections in his life. Things occurred; then there were blanks. During the blanks he smoked a lot. During one of them Flora came up to town, visited his rooms in Clare Street and explored, with pretty liftings of skirt and charming pouts, the innumerable places his landlady had never dusted. He liked being with Flora. Elspeth, for this desultory mood, would have been too precise, too hard; she was never desultory; she lived like a ledger and carried forward at the end of every day. So, as it was not *matinée* day, Huncote induced Flora to walk with him from St. Panwich to St. John's Wood, as she declared that she would rather stay with a friend of hers than in his undusted rooms, even though that friend had married a vicar. The walk was like his life, desultory. It began at the St. Panwich High Street, where Flora's prettiness attracted attention; the greengrocer's boy interrupted an argument with one of his peers to beg Huncote to leave the girl alone. Flora tittered, while Huncote walked very stiff and hot by her side, and the two boys behind them produced poor imitations of feminine giggles and squeals of: "Don't, Algy, you're squeezing." They straggled along through Regent's Park that was fresh with spring, the new grass purple-spangled with crocuses. Flora, after shyly alluding to her new conquests, chattered of the graces of Lewis Waller, and the desirability of coloured socks for men, then became serious.

"Oh, Roger," she groaned, "how I hate St. Olaves!"

He looked at her humorously.

"You'd hate London if you lived in it," he said, "you only want a change. You ought to live in a cinema."

"I'd love to live in a cinema. Not in the St. Olaves one; it's too violent. You know, Roger, cinemas always are more violent in cathedral towns. They take people's mind off it."

They progressed towards St. John's Wood, Flora still bemoaning her fate.

"It's mother," she said. "There she is with her half-socialism, with her half-suffrage, sticking in the mud and me with her. And she calls herself progressive!"

"She is — for St. Olaves. Flora, dear, don't you see that if she came to town she'd no longer be progressive, no longer have prospects?"

"Well, what if she hadn't? Prospects are for youth, retrospects for age."

Huncote looked at her amazed.

"Flora! This is the most modern kind of epigram: it means nothing, it's entirely idiotic, and it sounds profound. Flora! I believe you've fallen in love with a member of the St. Olaves Fabian nursery."

She laughed, she blushed. (She did both prettily.) And her brother's guess was right enough, for the remark had been made by a young architect, the philosophical anarchist who was restoring the gargoyles of the Abbey, singing as he so did most obscene Italian songs. (A minor canon, who understood Italian, caught him at it once but was nonplussed when told that profanity formed an essential part of the mediæval spirit of worship.) But it was not Flora's policy to announce her scalps; mystery made them more: had she fallen in love with a hydra she would not have hinted at a hundred heads.

Instead she went on mourning; in St. Olaves she was marooned.

"Look at that," she cried, in Marlborough Road, pointing to the grounds of the Fly-Fishing School, where the trees, like tall black-clad schoolgirls, crowned with stray green leaves, curtsied to the light spring wind. "Look at that; it's like St. Olaves, only it's London. Roger, we ought to have a house here. D'you think mother would?" She grew excited, seized him

by the arm as she looked at the beautiful wild plot of meadow and trees where sometimes nightingales sing, yet of the builder spared. "Roger, d'you think it would be very dear — to buy that land — and to build a house? Oh, Roger, you build a house. You're rich!"

"I'm not."

"Oh, yes, you are. Oh, Roger, do build a house, and I'll be your housekeeper, and I shan't interfere with you when you've got somebody really nice coming to see you. I'll always be out."

He laughed. "That's what you call being a housekeeper!"

But Flora was really interested, and as they went along towards the Abbey Road where she left him at her friend's gate, she was still excitedly talking of the St. Olaves house which her mother ought to build on the plot where the Hampstead stockbrokers learnt to cast flies into the currant bushes.

II

It was only just then that dimly, as if he saw them through ground glass, Huncote, after three months of service at the Settlement, realised its internal organs. Not clearly, of course; it was something like a radio photograph he saw,— a moving shadow that might be a beating heart or merely a stodgy lump of something dead, called Principles. More dimly he began to see persons behind the movement. Once upon a time the movement had a soul of its own, had been a beneficent spirit incorporeal.

Now, rather suddenly, he found men behind the movement, and it made the movement a little coarse. It was a shock, just like finding out that the London and South Western, in whose first-class carriages one had ridden as often as possible with a third-class ticket,

materialised in the form of a shareholder, a nice old lady who gave one tea in a Rockingham teacup and sent half sovereigns to missions.

But because Huncote was what he was, that is indirect, he was quite unable to understand the picture system by observing it, just as he was unable to understand the purity system by observing it: his was the way of the crayfish, and he could conclude as to the pictures only by observing purity. The purity was really very interesting. It had newly been introduced into St. Panwich when the Settlement in its layness realised that the Alliance of Honour and the Reverend F. B. Meyer had brought off a corner in local purity movements. And the Settlement (being lay) thought it rather a pity that the people, in the course of being made pure, should also have to be saved.

"You see," said Churton, whom Huncote suspected of having created the whole idea and of hiding it with the ostentatious modesty so rife in public-school boys, "we felt we couldn't leave it out. Not exactly nice, of course. Only when they've got this sort of thing all over the place . . ."

He held out to Huncote a little pamphlet, entitled "THE TEMPLE OF MY BODY. To Young Men. The Road to Purity (48th edition, 157th thousand)."

Huncote looked at "the sort of thing" with rather uncertain emotions. He read the confession of a man who said he had a very prurient imagination, then vague allusions to the maelstrom of passion and the bliss of wedlock. He read also a pathetic little story, entitled "Excelsior", beginning with the body of a well-dressed young woman found hanging in a doss-house. It was quite an exciting little book, with pictures of the *Titanic* going down, and of British soldiers defending in a probable Transvaal something that looked like a tram but probably was not. It was quite the sort of thing that boys might read, only it was not convenient

for lay purposes owing to the religious allusions at the end. It was rather a revelation to Huncote. He had never realised before until he saw the literature, "The Knight of the White Cross", "Royal Womanhood in every Rank", and many such like, that there were classes which the community flooded with pamphlets and more efficiently watched than it had ever watched him at his public school or university. He had been pi-jawed. They were being morally organised. It was funny, and it was awkward too; it made him quite uncomfortable at Fighting Bill's boxing class to which he returned. How could he know, as he watched these nice boys sparring, that they had not recently been vaccinated with puritine? Where were the mental scabs? he wondered. And while Fighting Bill murmured: "That's nice," and then roared: "Clinch, you silly kid!" Huncote found himself haunted by the Reverend Stopford Brooke's admonitory verse:

"Three girls began that summer night,
A life of endless shame,
And went through drink, disease and death,
As swift as racing flame."

Still, it did not make everybody uncomfortable, and one of those whom it best pleased was clearly George Green. What George Green was doing in the Settlement, in fact on the Committee, was rather mysterious. He was about forty-five and had the white podgy face of the unaired and the unexercised. His large nose, heavy at the tip and turned up, conveyed unlimited pugnacity. Huncote hated him, largely because black hairs stuck out of his nostrils; he was bald too, and a paunch was developing. He hated the insinuating confidence of the man, half-shamed, half-boastful, when George Green conveyed that he was sober and uxorious, having made up his mind to get on and discovered that drink cost money and women didn't. In those early

days Huncote was still able to believe that something noble and disinterested struggled in George Green's alleged soul. Only it was jolly hard to find that something. What could one expect of a man with such a voice? a voice like a squashed tomato? If Huncote had known he would have been less surprised and more indignant; he would have known that Green had picked up in the course of his business as a builder some mortgages on houses pulled down to build the Settlement. He had realised that the Settlement might grow and had shown himself so interested, so easy in his terms that on the creation of the Committee, competition not yet being keen, he had obtained a seat. The Settlement had been extended from time to time. Churton was sometimes puzzled by an architectural problem; then the builder would say: "Leave it to me and my man, Mr. Churton; me and 'im'll do it for you at corst price."

Huncote had not realised this; he had but glimpsed it just as he was now glimpsing the sensuous connections between the builder and the purity movement. He awoke to it only when George Green came to his office to complain about a secular short story in pamphlet form; with this the Settlement tried to warn youth against perils which the Settlement was too modest to name. It was the usual kind of warning: rather suggestive, entirely uneducational.

"Now I arsk yer, Mr. 'Uncote, what's the good o' this? 'Oo's goin' to read this? That wot yer call ginger?"

Huncote read the opening, which had been composed, he seemed to remember, by Mrs. Ramsey, entitled "Beauty's Shrine":

"Upon a beautiful April morning a young Englishman, tall and fair as a Greek God, stood by the side of a brook. By his side a young maiden of sweet seventeen sat at his feet with her eyes glued to the summons that he should join

100 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

his regiment. They did not speak but listened to the noise, far away, of a train¹ in the valley. She looked up to him, her eyes swimming in tears, and said: 'Oh, Archie, must you go?'

"'It is my duty,' said the young soldier, for he was a son of the bulldog breed. . . ."

In due course the story became pathetic; the young soldier was tempted more often than even most young soldiers are tempted and more horribly, for it was almost impossible to find out from the story how or by what he was tempted. He had enteric (it was so difficult to miss enteric about 1902), so probably his nurse was at fault. But he surmounted all these anonymous temptations by the strength of his ethical purposes, and he came back a long time later, grizzled and sunburnt, with a scar upon his forehead to find the maiden waiting for him at the Ch—— railway station.

"No," said Huncote, at length, "I suppose it isn't exactly what you'd call catchy." He reflected that it was a pity they had put Mrs. Ramsey on this work. Her specialty was not literature but the white slave traffic.

"Now look 'ere," said George Green, "you take my tip, Mr. 'Uncote, we don' want none of this 'ere lardydar psalm-smitin' wi'out the psalms. Wot you want is somethin' as they'll think 'ot."

Huncote looked at him rather puzzled.

"Oh, surely, Mr. Green, you'd be creating the evil you want to root out?"

The builder made a large gesture with a short arm.

"You don' take me. Wot we've got to do is to git them inter the Settlement. Don't matter 'ow yer do it; git 'em in, Settlement does the rest. It's like the Fabian Society." His tone became knowing. "Besides, 'oo cares? We ain't so partic'lar, you an' me." He nudged Huncote with a violent elbow. "We ain't

¹ Originally "church bells." Deleted by the Committee.

above a week-end at Brighton, are we? Eh, wot?" (Eh, what? was popular in those days.)

Huncote looked at him more amused than disgusted. He was faintly beginning to grasp the nature of George Green's interest in this purity movement. Why, the man actually liked purity because it made impurity more impure. It was as wonderful as it was disgusting.

The builder went on:

"Tell yer wot, these pictures of swells round the fountain in Piccadilly, that's too rekerky, as the French say. If yer want 'em to read the stuff put on somethin' 'ot, picture of Venus of Milo, or somethin'."

"'Ot?" thought Huncote. "'Ot!"

The builder grew purposeful: purity excited him. He hinted at an early marriage, not regretted, for, of course, "the missis was the best woman in the world, but still, one does want a bit of a change, and the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, as Shakespeare says."

Still Huncote listened to him, glad to listen; the builder was willing to talk and revealed himself so completely, every side of himself, his love of home and his respect of it, his real and deep love of his wife and children, all these things stowed away in a water-tight compartment; outside that compartment the gay world of larks and smut where moved women figures, prostitutes or female employees, born for his pleasure. Huncote did not like to comment on his private life; anything but generalities made him shy. Indeed he grew so shy that he deflected the conversation as he did not know how to get rid of Green. From home he tried to lead him to building. But Green had a good deal to say about home; he loved it as he loved his wealth because he had earned both at the price of much suffering, much labour, by dint of an obstinate fighting courage, of a tireless enterprise in finding out who had land, who money, and who wanted to build.

"Bort a pianner the other day for the nursery," he confided. "O' course, we already 'ad one in the drawring-room. Still, 'ad to 'ave another for the smalls." He reflected upon his greatness; then, as if soliloquising: "So the wife plays the drawring-room one, and Arabella plays the nursery one with all the windows open. That fetches the neighbours, I can tell yer." He grew intense: "I'd put down another forty quid, I would, just to shew 'em."

Huncote could not help laughing, but Green looked at him stupidly. Then, deciding that Huncote had laughed out of courtesy, went on: "You ain't thinkin' of buildin', Mr. 'Uncote, are yer?"

"Oh, no," said Huncote. "What would I want with a house, Mr. Green? Even though my sister has fallen in love with a piece of land in Marlborough Road where she wants me to build a house for her and me, which is of course absurd."

There was a perceptible pause. George Green's eyes became fixed, and a curve came into his shoulders as he were a beast about to spring. "Oh, that ain't a bad ideer. That neighbourhood's comin' on. Tell yer wot," he added, with a burst of frankness, "runnin' up rows and rows of places that ain't worth twenty poun's a year, that ain't enough for me. Let me 'ave a go at something tony. Now, Mr. 'Uncote, you let me run you up a little 'ouse in the Marlborough Road. Do it for yer in first class style. Wot d'yer say to 'Lisbethan? with the plaster painted up nice to look like beams, an' a gable or two; they don' corst much more really. And I allus say there's nothin' like a porch to give a 'ouse tone, with some art noovo glass. Abart ten rooms. Do it for yer for fifteen 'undred quid." He nudged him. "What say?"

Huncote edged away; this was horrible. Here indeed was George Green working with the energy that had made him. One word and up came the idea, the

whole house, its riot of bastard styles, its accommodation, its cost, and behind it, driving it, the fierce will of George Green, conqueror.

Huncote found excuses. He had not made up his mind; he had no money. George Green said no more. He went away; he could wait and try again. He had often waited and tried again in his forty-five years, and he was ready to go on. So that was it: George Green, sensualist, behind the purity which whipped his impure desires; George Green, builder, behind the Committee which gave out plumbing orders, used cement, bricks, gravel. It was like a watch-dog, this horrible lucidity. And Platt was visible too, Platt of "The Golden Staircase", Platt of "Dante's First Sight of Beatrice", preparing the way to a safe seat. The men behind the movement, men fallible. For a shattering moment Huncote saw the movement as fallible as they.

III

And yet he did not refuse to join the Committee when, rather suddenly, at the end of April he was nominated. Suddenly? It seemed suddenly and yet it was not, for Green, working as usual on lines obscured, came to him two days after this conversation.

"You orter be on the Committee, Mr. 'Uncote. The first time as I set eyes on yer, I says to Mr. Churton, I says, 'That's the gent. We want more like 'im.'" His little dark eyes grew smaller and more brilliant. "There's a vacancy, there allus is a vacancy." He rolled over Huncote's protests. "Leave it all ter me. Oh, no, there won't be no opposition, I'll put it across 'em if there is."

And somehow within a few weeks Huncote found himself paralysed into accepting this nomination. He was entangled too in a conversation which hideously connected with the previous one about the house he

ought to build in the fly-fishing school. "Go on, Mr. 'Uncote," said the voice of the siren, "I'm not trying to rush yer; 'ave a little 'ouse if yer want it; pay wot yer like and 'ave wot yer like, that's wot I allus says."

Huncote was nudged and helplessly found himself saying he'd think it over, just as helplessly as he had accepted the nomination. He could not stand up to this man. Purity, building, and committee wangling, it was all too much for him. George Green talked a lot about wangling; Huncote did not quite know what it was, but anyhow he was wangled on to the Committee within a fortnight, and every day he grew more afraid that he would also be wangled into the house in Marlborough Road.

He entered the Committee-room with a distinct sense of promotion. It was a wilfully official room; the walls were decorated solely with photos of lay football teams, quotations from *Sesame and Lilies*; the chairs had been selected hard enough to expedite business. It was not too stunning, however, for by now Huncote knew most of the members: Churton, ex-officio, Platt of the Temple Club, Miss Miskin, who that day still looked like a wet lizard but was not hysterical. There was Mrs. Ramsey too, and a woman whom Huncote did not know. She was the wife of a Progressive County Councillor and watched Charlie's interests inside the Settlement while Charlie himself kept out and did the chapels. (St. Panwich had done the usual thing: after electing Sir Henry Govan as its Conservative M.P. it had felt sorry and returned the anonymous Charlie as Progressive for the L.C.C.) She never said anything, she just watched.

Churton read at trained speed the minutes of the last meeting. They were signed by Platt, the day's chairman. There were no checks, no jocularities, even though this was a Monday; probably the chairs were too hard. Churton reported the yield of an appeal for

funds. This was for the purchase of more autotypes, as the Settlement endowment was enough only to keep up the fabric and pay the secretary. Indeed there seemed to be trouble which Huncote did not understand between the Committee and the Trustees. So far as he could gather the Trustees refused to invest a thousand pounds' worth of drawn bonds in some remunerative stock proposed by the Committee.

"Perfectly scandalous," said Mrs. Ramsey. "We've no power at all and think of the work we have to do." There was a pause of approval. Miss Miskin fiercely added that the Trustees were doing all they could to kill their work and that this reduction of their income by fifteen pounds was evidence of it. At last Platt intervened, his intention being to get on good terms with both Trustees and Committee, and promised to draft a letter to the Trustees, suggesting a compromise.

A vote for repairing the leaky roof of the east wing was passed. "Only a slate or two," said George Green, "leave it to my man and me; me an' 'im'll do it at corst price."

Churton reported on the arrangements for the dance in another fortnight, which caused further acidity.

"If you ask me," said Mrs. Ramsey, "there's more harm than good done by these dances. We live among a loose population which it is our business to raise, not to degrade."

"Surely there's nothing degrading about a dance, Mrs. Ramsey," said Platt suavely.

"I don't say there is, and I'm not going to talk religion though you all know my views. I've come into this Lay Settlement setting aside my deepest feelings." Murmur of approval from Miss Miskin. "And we all know that the ramifications of the white slave traffic . . ."

For several minutes Mrs. Ramsey exposed the soul-market which might or might not be established within

a Settlement dance, until at last, and in the nick of time, she was interrupted by Miss Miskin. Said the lizard:

"And they get very hot, and when they're hot they have too much to drink. This Settlement does not take enough notice of the drink problem . . ."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Miskin," said Platt, "but we supply lemonade."

"They go to the public house during the intervals," snarled Miss Miskin.

"And greater evils follow," her ally, Mrs. Ramsey, went on.

It was all Churton and Platt could do, with a little help from Huncote, to explain that even if the dance ended in all the men being drunk and all the girls being kidnapped to Buenos Ayres, the posters were out, and it would have to happen. The Committee slowly resolved into grumbling consideration of the decay of the area railings. The anonymous Mrs. Charlie remained all through eloquently watchful. She was like a mechanical tiger in the attitude of springing, but with the spring broken. Huncote did not pay much attention to the next proceedings, for this sensation of seeing things through ground glass was on him still. Mrs. Ramsey and Miss Miskin were showing him their fierce hatred of the pleasure which they helped to organise; the spinster, rather soured, seemed to have come in to make other lives sour, though she did not know it. Doubtless she meant well. "Those are the worst," he thought, with sudden cynicism. And Mrs. Ramsey, fuming against immorality, was filling his mind with thoughts of immorality. They seemed so queer, these fierce busybodies, and brought out in such sharp relief by suave Platt, so determined to be universally popular. Platt smiled on Huncote a smile that said: "Let me see, you've got a lodger's vote in Clare Street, haven't you?" Huncote hated him.

Later Fighting Bill, who was not a member of the Committee but had been co-opted by a sub-committee, was admitted to decide whether women should be admitted to the Progress Arms. The report, which was signed by him, the anonymous Mrs. Charlie, and Miss Miskin, left the Committee much embarrassed, for the Fighting Parson's attitude had been: "Let them all come into the Progress Arms, and let's have beer instead of cocoa," while Miss Miskin's view was that the Progress Arms should be treated as was Gomorrah. As for the anonymous Mrs. Charlie, she had taken a line so skilfully intermediate that it was indistinguishable. And the debate, which clearly had raged in the meetings of the sub-committee, began again.

"One thing leads to another," said Miss Miskin obstinately. "If you let women in you let in the wrong kind of cheerfulness."

Mrs. Ramsey protested.

"Oh, you know what I mean, Mrs. Ramsey," the lizard snapped. "All I say is that if you mix the sexes in a place like that the demand arises for something stronger than cocoa."

"D'you suggest it's the women who demand beer?" asked Fighting Bill.

"No, Mr. Ford, I've already replied in sub-committee to that preposterous question. At any rate I do not want the women in."

"Well, I do," said Fighting Bill. Then with irritating affectation: "Bless 'em!"

The debate was complicated by the intervention of Mrs. Ramsey who saw dangers other than drink in the frequentation of the Progress Arms by women. The position seemed to be that the men seemed disinclined to go without their sweethearts and wives, and that the Progress Arms might as well be shut up for all the patronage it secured.

"Let it be shut up," screamed Miss Miskin.

"Beer instead of cocoa," growled the Fighting Parson.

It was like rival war cries. Huncote interfered, pleaded for a little Liberalism, pointed out that if the Progress Arms did not admit women the King's Arms did. He was sat upon by both the women, while the parson laughed and Platt attempted to soothe everybody. Then George Green was drawn in. "I'm not one for the drink," he said, fixing Miss Miskin with an imploring eye, "been a teetotaler all my life, but wot I says is this, if a woman's going to make a beast of 'erself she don' want to go to the Progress Arms ter do it, not she!"

Platt came in with a diplomatic suggestion that it should be tried for a month. For the first time that afternoon the anonymous Mrs. Charlie seemed moved to enthusiasm. George Green seemed disappointed. Miss Miskin could not very well refuse, any more than he could, and so very soon it was decided to try for a month the admission of women to the Progress Arms. Very soon afterwards, in the midst of heaviness, when Ford had left the Committee after telling Huncote in an undertone that if Canterbury had never abandoned Rome this scene would not have occurred, the proceedings closed on one of the frequent wrangles between George Green and the rest of the Committee because he ended by lighting his pipe. An acrid discussion showed that this was looked upon as disrespectful to the ladies.

Later in the day Huncote was still thinking of these people, together and separately. Separately of Platt, giving his labour so that a constituency might learn to know him, of Churton, paid and prostrate before the sublime, if not very clear vision of his masters, of Miss Miskin, anxious that nobody should drink, of Mrs. Ramsey that nobody should stray. He thought of George Green too, who in a flashing sentence had told

him, without knowing it, why he supported the admission of women to the Progress Arms: "They'll come right enough, you'll see. The Arms won't be big enough: in a month we'll 'ave to extend them, throw out a wing at the back. What?"

It was dreadful, it was all so small, so inefficient; it would have been better, thought Huncote, to fall among highwaymen than among speculators.

IV

Like a child that has been hurt Huncote went to St. Olaves, not telling himself that his mother would comfort him, but instinctively. Within a few minutes he knew that his mother could never do much more for him than be untidy and pleasing. So he did not say what he had wanted to say, or discuss with her whether, as she had once so acutely suggested, he should persist in the error of staying in the Settlement when he no longer believed in it. Instead he called on the Dean and tried, which was not easy, to be respectful to the church and loyal to the laity. And everybody talked to him about the Settlement as they talk of the army to a soldier. So he who had come to throw off the organisation found himself recruiting for it. The big dance was coming off, and women helpers could not be too many. Elspeth refused.

"No, thanks! I know the sort of thing, a collection of all the undesirables in the district and no enquiries made."

"We don't have the tickets countersigned by the C.O.S., if that's what you mean," said Huncote acridly. Brother and sister then sulked for three meals.

Flora was different. "Oh, I'd love to come; it's sweet of you, Roger." She put a pointed little hand upon his elbow and ogled him. "I love dancing," she said.

Her brother patted the little hand. "You know, I don't promise you a life guard."

She laughed. "Roger, dear, even a railway guard would be a blessing in a place like this."

This was not exactly social zeal, Roger thought, but still . . .

The dance was on a Saturday night in the big lecture room. The forms stood against the walls, and everything had been violently washed; a new text had been added to the William Morris and the Ruskin, reading: "The Peace that passeth all Understanding be upon this House", etc. The artist had forgotten the "n" in "understanding", which was very fortunate, for two out of three of the helpers, as Huncote entered the dressing-room, asked him whether "the peace that passed all udderstanding", etc. He grew rather tired of that joke in the course of the evening.

When he went into the hall the couples were already dancing stiffly to the strains of the Settlement band. It was a good band except that there was a piccolo in it.

"You see," said Miss Underwood, "we had to let the piccolo in. It would have been so hard on the poor fellow if we hadn't."

It was not yet warm in the hall, for only twenty couples were dancing, and of those over a dozen were boys and girls of the people, partnered with enormous self-consciousness by serious young men from the universities and imported West-enders who were raking their brains to find something more suitable to talk of than the Riviera and winter sports. But all along the sides of the hall was a staid mob that overflowed into lobbies and corridors. These were quite young girls from the laundry, step-girls at twopence a morning, pale girls who worked at home at box and buttonhole making, and a rowdier, fresh-faced kind, abundantly shawled, that sold flowers. At a little respectful distance were the men, young artisans and shopboys, and overgrown tele-

graph boys, proud of their uniform and disinclined to consort with anything less than a boy scout. Little by little the talk increased though still exclusively monosexual: there was no blending of the sexes yet, except that sweethearts kept together with a mixture of satisfaction and rigid conventionality.

The band banged and ripped from waltz to mazurka and on to a quadrille. Churton came in a little anxious, though cadaverous and beaming. At once he was organising, and Huncote, suffering a pang of self-consciousness, was thrust into the arms of something fat and pink, with a row of sham pearls round its neck, that giggled and blushed while he blushed and stammered. Its surname he did not know, but only its name, Hilda. They danced. The girl danced well, and for a moment all was well, but Huncote knew he would have to say something and, struggle as he might, he could think only of the word Hilda. At last, with a great effort, he brought out: "Very hot, isn't it?"

She tossed fair curls. "Oh, I don't think so, not for this time of year."

Huncote paused. Should he talk about the time of year? He felt impelled to ask her what her work was and remembered just in time that they were all ladies and gentlemen that night. Still, he had to lead something. He was skilful.

"That depends," he said, "whether you go out a lot during the day."

"I don't much; I'm in business, you see."

This was not very informative; he read her shopgirl, while she was factory. So they ploughed on, Hilda laughing and giggling at nothing, while he talked rather priggishly about the dancing classes which the Settlement had been running of late months.

"Oh, I don't need them," said the girl, rather acid, and Huncote realised that this had been taken as a re-

flection on her dancing. He was glad when it was over. Fortunately they did not have to sit out.

He did not at once begin to dance again, for there had been a slight increase in the number of couples. He saw Churton, dark and long as a day without caresses, in the embrace of a young woman still longer, it seemed, because she was thinner; he saw Miss Underwood, very languid and negligent, guiding without apparent effort the uncertain steps of Fred Beesby, the young man who had "sorced the beak."

Quite insensibly, as if obeying a class custom, he found himself clustering with the men of whom there were still a good many groups segregated opposite a lot of girls who conversed in shrill undertones and held each other's hands and waists. He edged nearer and nearer to the men, hardly knowing how to begin to talk to them. Platt did; Platt always talked to the men, for women's suffrage had not yet come in. He envied Platt, he envied the beam upon his legal face, even the reassuring benevolence of his forehead. He heard a scrap of a sentence.

"—Easter soon. We'll have to be thinking of cricket; that's a good manly sport."

George Green, dancing with a red-haired girl over whom he hung, rather close-pressed, threw him as he passed an oily wink.

Several of the young men glanced at Huncote, then ostentatiously turned away. They were jolly and chaffing as no girls were there to make them self-conscious; he heard an argument as to whether one of them preferred ginger beer. There seemed to be a lot of guffawing over this; then somebody in a very tight blue suit and a very high collar, obviously a clerk, said: "All right, 'Erb, I don't want to cast any nasturtiums on you!"

Huncote pondered over this for some time. Then a young man, who had been watching the others with an

air so sardonic that it could not be natural, addressed him.

"You're Mr. Huncote," said the young man. Then, definitely: "My name's Caldwell, Albert Caldwell. They call me Bert mostly."

"Oh, good evening," said Huncote, uncertain, half-putting out his hand. The young man did not take it. He was of the middle size, fairly sturdy, looked about twenty-eight, and was the ordinary kind of blue-eyed, fair-haired young artisan.

"Why aren't you dancing?" asked Huncote.

"I might ask you that," said Caldwell, "only you're an official."

Huncote laughed. "Oh, don't call me anything so big; I'm only helping."

The young man grew hostile. "Helping! If only people wouldn't help us! It's helping keeps the people down. You can't help 'em up, Mr. Huncote; you can only tread on their faces when they're down."

Huncote looked at him rather surprised. This was not party conversation.

"Surely," he said, "we don't tread on the people's faces."

"No," said Caldwell ferociously, as if the presence of the "swell" galled him, "I only wish you would. What you do to the people's faces is to stroke them, and so there they lie in the gutter." He raised an arm and began to shout.

"Steady, old Keir Hardie," cried one of his friends. But Bert took no notice, and within a few seconds the full socialist case was being stated to Huncote. Combined with the surrounding conversation it made a strange mixture.

"Charity's the thing that makes the people bear what they ought to learn not to bear. This idea of stopping the class war, this Settlement idea, what is it?"

Chorus of ironic parties: "Yes, what is it?"

Bert turned upon the group with ferocity. "You don't want to know, that's why you ask." He returned to Huncote and poured upon him a description of the depravity and degradation and other words in "d" from which he excluded "damnation" (because he did not believe in God) to which the people were subjected.

And yet Huncote could not fix himself; he was still hypnotised by the ironic parties, by the arrival of another to whom somebody said: "Good evening, my lord duke!"

Somehow the incipient wrangle was stifled. It was Miss Underwood who did it. She came up to ranting Bert and with a smile told those who were laughing at him that she was quite on their side but also on his. "Mr. Caldwell," she said, "I've been looking for you everywhere. Do you know, you were just going to cut my dance?" The eloquence oozed out of the orator. He blushed violently. "Up go the socialist colours," said a whitey-green boy, but Bert was too overcome to reply; Theresa held him because he had nearly broken his word. For him an awful risk! She was doing more; she was chasing the girls from their groups and, two by two, leading them to the men, pairing them off. Huncote liked to see her move; she moved so easily, like a lily hardly swaying in the wind.

"And you, Mr. Huncote, come along with me and Mr. Caldwell; there's somebody I want you to dance with very particularly."

Huncote did not want to dance, remembering his other partner, but what was he to do, with those half-pathetic, half-humorous brown eyes fixed upon him? He could not withstand the laughter that was in the curves of the rather loose mouth. Soon he stood before a dark young girl, Miss Groby. For a moment, as Theresa danced away in the arms of Bert Caldwell, he was uncertain. Then, and quite suddenly it seemed, everything grew easy. It was as if a change had come

over the room; many more couples were dancing now, and there was some rowdiness in the air; people talked louder, and Huncote's heart leapt with it as if he had been snatched up with many other young things and with them become aware of youth.

He realised that he had been staring at the girl while he thought of something else. He said: "I beg your pardon."

"Granted," she replied.

He looked at her more closely.

His perceptions were more acute now; he saw that she too must have been thinking of something else, for her eyes rested away from him. Indeed they followed Bert Caldwell as he went away with Miss Underwood. Sweethearts, no doubt; so much the better. It led naturally to conversation. They began to dance. Miss Groby did not dance well, and at first they did not speak while he learnt her step. Then he said:

"I've just been talking to Mr. Caldwell; I think you know him?"

"Yes," said Miss Groby, "he does go on, doesn't he?"

Huncote laughed at her seriousness.

"Eyes of youth," he said, rather priggishly; "see the dream behind the shadow."

Miss Groby looked up at him with intense seriousness, evidently interested, evidently not understanding at all. As they looked at each other she interested him. Over her broad, low forehead, its whiteness enriched by a touch of yellow, a mass of thick black hair, done in many curls, clustered close. As they danced there fell upon it from the lights a sheen, sometimes brown, sometimes violet. The eyes that looked up at him were large and very dark brown, like port when no light shines through it. They looked at him steadfast, rather far apart, under heavy arched brows that made her appear trustful. She could be shy, but just then she was not

shy, for she was interested by the sound of words that meant nothing, but caressed her. And suddenly, conscious of her stare, she blushed. It was the faintest blush, so dark was she, as the last peering of the sunset through the wing of dusk. He too blushed and felt absurdly young, he who at twenty-three was so old. They danced on, and quickly he asked her whether she liked dancing, as if to relieve the tension of the first moment.

"I love it," she said enthusiastically. Then, as she trod on him: "Sorry. You see, I don't get much of a chance."

He asked her whether she never went to dances other than those of the Settlement. It seemed that she did sometimes with — with friends to whom she later alluded with a blush as "them." Indeed all through that dance Huncote was a little puzzled because Miss Groby never said "he"; she said "they." It made him wonder, though he should not have cared, whether she meant Bert Caldwell.

And so, as they danced, Miss Groby prattled on, sometimes simple, sometimes stilted. She was half-natural when she told him that she did not go out to work but washed fine lace and blouses at home; then, when Huncote was about to talk of the washerwoman's trade, Miss Groby grew refined.

"I get a good deal of time to myself; that's nice, don't you think?"

He was conscious just then of her hand in his, which he could feel muscular through the cotton glove. He said:

"And what d'you do with yourself then? D'you read or . . .?"

"Oh, yes, I'm a great reader."

Huncote hesitated to ask what she read, but already enthusiastic, alive to herself, Miss Groby abandoned books in general, and concentrating upon a story un-

known to Huncote, in which there was a guardsman and a bad foreign princess, began to tell him the plot.

He was not so relieved as the other time when his dance was done; it had been very much the same, for his new partner wore sham pearls just like the first, and it had been the same kind of conversation. He supposed he was getting used to the atmosphere. Indeed he was, for he grew bolder; it grew warmer, introductions were offered him, and he accepted them; he even danced once more with the little fat rose. In a break he had a word with George Green. Green had to relinquish his partner, a small, pale girl, with big green eyes and a very red mouth that drooped like the lip of a lily. The builder had, it seemed to Huncote, been holding the girl too close. When her new partner came, Green, who sat by her side, had his shoulder upon hers and leant, whispering very close to the little ear, half-buried in pale straight hair.

Green winked at him. "I watched you dancing, Mr. 'Uncote. Yer don't give the girls 'arf a chance." He nudged him. "Yer take a leaf out of my book." He figured his attitude, clearly showing that his hand would grasp his partner above the elbow: "The gay fantastic, eh?" He hugged the air violently. "That's the way, Mr. 'Uncote. Give 'em a little bit o' the Boston from Paree; they like it, bless 'em."

Huncote turned away disgusted. He could not fix the disgustingness, but somehow it was there. When one is fat one ought not to be white, or if one is, one should not dance. Green was repulsive just then; with sweat upon his face he was like a bladder of lard in hot weather.

It was nearly twelve o'clock; the character of the dance had changed. No stiffness now and no introducing, but partner-snatching and guffaws, a haze in the air, making the lights mysterious, eyes deeper, cheeks brighter, hair more brilliant and unruly. He

danced with two more girls, and a third led him into a lancer set which, as the hour advanced, turned from the drawing-room kind into the most violent kitchen type. Again he danced with Miss Groby.

He did not remember the next day what he had said; nothing of any importance. But it was nice to dance with her again. She smiled at him as he came up to her; he had seen her mouth, so agreeable, he thought, with its fullness and its many curves, the lips parted and upturned, showing dark against the pale honey of her skin.

His reserve was gone, and somehow all was well. He joked with Churton; Platt looked funny and grandfatherly; he even challenged Miss Miskin to a dance which was austere and fortunately refused him. Yes, there was something in the Settlement after all if of so much youth it could make so much gaiety. In the refectory a little later, as he drank a glass of lemonade with his partner, he saw Miss Underwood watching him with a faint, half-ironic smile. He smiled back at her rather more broadly than he meant, as if he could so smile at all the world. She was charming, he thought. Again he had to think of a lily or rather of a reed, tall, slim, a little disdainful. She came closer, and her left eyebrow rose. "Enjoying yourself?" she asked.

"Rather," he said, suddenly boyish.

"That's right," said Miss Underwood comfortably. The deep brown eyes seemed veiled as if by the shadow of long downcast lashes, and Huncote for a second felt a little too young.

Much later, as he went to sleep, confused thought passed through his brain. First Miss Underwood, just gracious; all those people he had seen that night, so young, a little gross in their merriment but — so merry in their grossness. He thought of the young men so brisk, of Miss Groby and, of the tender mouth turned

back upon the pale honey of her skin, but much more of the Settlement, a good fairy, author of the night's delights. Insensibly from enthusiasm he passed into dream.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH

ANDROMEDA

I

THE lecturer droned on amiably. He had analysed *Sartor Resartus*; he had been mildly humorous about the pronunciation of Teufelsdröckh; he had jarred Huncote's nerves by smiling at a group of women and saying that in mixed company he dared not pursue beyond trousers the preoccupations of Carlyle, and they had laughed, servilely laughed. Smokily, gloomily, fell the light, for the globes were dirty. Feet shifted, and because it had rained, a scent of moist clothes and ill-washed bodies rose up. Huncote, on one of the cross seats near the platform, looked at the audience, many women, most of them of the class that improves its mind, artisans rather eager, the sort of artisan that knows its Spencer, its Darwin, and its John Lubbock. Huncote watched with half-amusement a young man who was slowly being garrotted by a cygnian collar; he was making notes. He was making notes nervously, it seemed indiscriminately, as a magpie collects spoons. The lecturer said:

"And if we look upon it broadly enough it is certain that genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains."

The strangulated youth made a note.

The lecturer wandered off into the life of Frederick the Great; he linked up the Prussian king with the heroes which should perhaps be worshipped; he dared to elaborate that "silence was deep as eternity." He explained that "speech was shallow as time."

Still the feet shifted and the clothes steamed; the young man shifted within the magic circle that marked him from a Fenchurch Street gehenna. And then a little later the lecturer alluded to Carlyle as the sage of Chelsea.

Huncote observed the secretary of the Mutual Improvement Society. He was just a smile for ever and ever. He had created the lecture society of which was to be born a world. Smokily, gloomily, fell the light and with it the misty illuminations of the surly old Scotch beast and his puny apoplexies. Long before the lecture was over Huncote hated the man and this accomplice audience who were indeed making fingent and fictile the ruggedness he had once loved. He did not follow very closely what was being said, catching a fragment now and then, a gentle regret that the sage "had taken such liberties with the King's English." He thought of himself within this system, these people being loaded with commonplaces by the commonplace, absorbing scraps of secondhand thought, making an idea out of a bit of Carlyle without having as a corrective say a bit of Montaigne. Scraps, always scraps; here they were, all of them in St. Panwich, trying of humanity to make royalties and actually placing upon the shoulders of men royal robes while leaving them ill-shod. He thought of the work he had been doing these last weeks, of the loan exhibition, of the reproduction of the Venus de Milo before which two young men, thinking themselves unobserved, had nudged each other. One of them had said: "Very 'ot!" Exactly what George Green had said! It was all wrong; at least nothing was right, and he found himself quoting a scrap of John Davidson:

"Now I fear the light;
I shrink from every sight;
I see there's nothing right;
I hope to die to-night."

All solemn, all turned to stone. The condition of the people: petrified or putrefied? Which was best? A revolt seized him, for here was the quality of difference between the lecture and the dance; there youth and gaiety, coarse perhaps but yet precious because rare as spikenard; here the locusts eating years. A hot feeling of enthusiastic memory came over him as he thought of the dance; it was like feeling by contrast, now that he hated these people in their smugness, learning, and thinking that by learning they would know; when he remembered the dance, where they did not think, but felt, he glowed, he loved them.

A little of his emotion came out soon after as he talked to Churton. The lecturer was being thanked, and the young man, who by this looked like a sardine collared in a fishing-net, had made a note (in memory of Lubbock) that the true university is a collection of books.

"How did you like it?" asked Churton, very serious.

Huncote laughed. "Fudge," he said.

Churton looked shocked, raised his eyebrows. "Well, well," he said, "a good eighteenth century word, a slight anachronism. 'Rubbish' would have appealed to the sage of . . ."

"I beg you, Churton, do not call him the sage of Chelsea. The sixty people who came here to-night and who have done you no harm will scatter that name through the generations."

"I don't see what you have against it," said Churton, "but you don't seem pleased."

"Pleased?" said Huncote bitterly. "Good heavens, Churton, you don't think we're doing any good at this game, giving these people scraps and tags, giving them an idea without its corrective, letting them mix Goethe with 'The Rosary.' Oh, I can hardly explain, but don't you see what I'm driving at? I mean what's the good of giving these people a sight of literature

with blinkers on? Give them the whole thing or give them nothing. These scraps only make them smug." He laughed: "I can hear half of them quoting a tag next week when the boiler goes wrong."

"We're not a university," said Churton loftily, "and the lecturer is not an encyclopædia."

"I'd want to be one," said Huncote.

Churton threw him an eloquent look, a look so eloquent that it was a whisper and a pat, a "hush" and "there, there" look.

"Self-sufficient young man," he said, "the greatest of faults is to be conscious of none, as," he wickedly added, "the sage of . . ."

Huncote grew vicious.

"Anyhow, Carlyle cribbed that from Pliny."

It was an acid moment, and there were other acid moments to come, moments of weariness, moments when Huncote, whose serenity was gone, lost his temper with the representative ministers of various sects and told one of them that one could not see Christ for their crosses; there was a more bitter moment still to come when the last scale of illusion fell from George Green.

In those days there was a penny weekly, called *The Jolly Roger*, which made it its business to unearth the decently buried corpses of scandals and shamelessly expose them to the public eye. A justice of the peace could not say that poachers should be shot, or a servant girl have an illegitimate baby, or a welsher change his address, without the *Jolly Roger* arming for an expedition. Having lost two libel actions instituted by bishops it turned its attention to the Settlements; its commissioners joined the workers of Toynbee Hall and of the Passmore-Edwards Settlement. In vain: the *Jolly Roger* had to wash its hands of them for no fault could be found there. But after glancing at the Leysian Mission they discovered something in the St. Panwich Lay

124 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

Settlement. The something came out in a long article which made the placard for the week:

Isn't George

GREEN?

(I don't think)

The gist of the article was in one of its paragraphs:

. . . so you see, the Board of Guardians wanted that bit of land. Had to have it in fact. So the Hon. Fitzallan said to the other guardians: "Haw! Haw! We've got to have that land, eh what? How can we get it?" And would you believe it that one of the other guardians said: "Leave it to me and me man, me and 'im'll do it." They did. This guardian went along to his brother-in-law George (alleged) Green, and George (incorruptible sea) Green, said: "It doesn't belong to me, I've no interest in it." But why or how did it happen that a sub-contractor, nameless still, had suddenly run up buildings on behalf of a contractor who, of course, was not employed by George (verdi) Green, but was employed by a contractor who worked on his wife's land. Singular and strange is the association between the faithful board of guardians, the brother-in-law guardian, contractor, sub-contractor, the wife, and at the end, most innocent, George (pseudo-verdant) Green.

The article was clear enough, though wrong in details. George Green owned the land in his wife's name, and as it was wanted by the board had caused jerry-buildings to be run up by a sub-contractor so as to sweat an increased price out of a gullible Board of Guardians with the help of his brother-in-law. A few days later Huncote, out of whose way the builder seemed to have kept, spoke to a few members of the Committee. The results were disappointing.

"My dear fellow," said Platt, "it's all very well, but you can't prevent Mrs. Green from owning land and from having buildings run up."

"Oh, don't talk rot," said Huncote rudely; "you know quite well it's Green's land."

"I know nothing of the kind," said Platt, "and no more does anybody." He grew fatherly: "Take my word for it and let these things alone, my dear fellow; they only make unpleasantness."

It passed through Huncote's mind that George Green was a prominent member of Platt's election committee; that rumour called Green a relentless enemy of Lady Govan ever since she had refused him the contract for building the Education League branch at Hertford. Platt was no good, a mere vote-monger. He tried Miss Miskin but found her quite indifferent, as was also Mrs. Ramsey. He caught them both together at the girls' sewing-class. "I don't see what the trouble is about," said Miss Miskin, fixing him with her reptile eye, "I've got some land of my own."

"I can't be bothered about it," said Mrs. Ramsey. "I've got too much to look after." She flung a circular look at the sewing-class which at that moment was respectfully folding up its work and casting from under its youthful brows shy glances at Huncote. "Anyhow, Mr. Huncote," she said, "I don't very much care for men to come into the class." Huncote flushed as if indeed he were the white slaver Mrs. Ramsey evidently saw in him.

It was no good; they did not care. Even George Green did not care. He did not speak of the scandal much; indeed only once was he direct and then he said:

"Tell yer wot, Mr. 'Uncote, it don't 'urt me. Fact is, it's a bit of an ad. for the firm. Only wants a bit o' moral courage, that's all it wants."

Huncote could have laughed, but he was sickened. Listlessly he went on with the work which had seized

him and out of which it was so difficult to get, with societies that trained boys and girls on leaving school, with milk clubs under royal patronage. He even attended a drawing-room meeting where there was a K. C. and an ex-Lady Mayoress, to discuss: "Where Will You Spend Eternity?" Truly a burning question.

He found himself walking very fast up Crapp's Lane, not noticing that day the barrows where the oranges glowed like dead suns. "I must go," he thought, "I must go." He could not understand the quality of those people, the limits of their activities, the directions of their enthusiasm. He could not understand that they could mean well, that indeed they thought themselves crusaders against drink, immorality, and ignorance, that they had come into power because they had executive energy, while finer folk had only ideals and uncertain impulses, that Platt thought not only to satisfy himself but also to benefit the world by becoming Platt, M. P. At the end of Crapp's Lane he met Ford, exchanging with a coster genial blasphemy and religious enlightenment.

"You look pretty groggy," said Ford.

Huncote could not keep down his misery; he told him everything, not very clearly. But the Fighting Parson understood. "Oh, I know," he said, "I know all that. One gets sick, one thinks it's no good and then — well, you have a pipe and an imperial pint, and go to a music hall, and you begin to see there's something in the Sermon on the Mount after all."

Huncote looked enviously at the big, blue-eyed parson, so like a large boy. Happy Ford, for whom in any public house flowed the fountain hippocrene. But Fighting Bill, unconscious of being analysed, was serious.

"Don't go," he said, "don't make Luther's mistake. He shouldn't have turned down the Church of Rome like that, he should have stuck it out and done his best

to introduce the latest improvements. You've got your devil, and it's no good asking the Almighty to cast him out; he didn't give him to you meaning to cast him out, he gave you your devil to be a trial to you, and for you to lay into him." The Fighting Parson dealt at the air a blow that would have pulverised any materialised demon. "See what I mean? Don't throw it over, stick to your Settlement and save its soul."

II

"And didn't that do you any good?" asked Theresa.

He shook his head. For a moment he looked at the tall girl who leant negligently against the wall, one arm akimbo, and thought that, so slim and so pale in her green Liberty gown, she was like a convolvulus. But he was too preoccupied with his own mind to think long of her just then.

"No," he said, "it's no good to me. Ford's devil's mediæval, he has horns and a cynical face like a Drury Lane ambassador. One can't believe in the devil when one doesn't believe in God, and, if it comes to that, I'm not sure I'm so keen on casting out the Son of the Morning. They called him Pan once upon a time."

Theresa opened her mouth to say: "And what do you know about Pan?" but, thinking it too personal, she said: "So you must draw your hope from ethics?"

Huncote nodded. "Yes, that's about it, and it rather looks as if Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the school regulations of the borough council were rather dry oranges." His ironic smile suddenly gave place to an air of misery. "It's no good," he said suddenly. "No good, Miss Underwood, really; we're not doing anything; I must give it up. I don't know what I can do instead."

Theresa's face grew serious. She suddenly forgot that she was twenty-six and very, very old by the side of this enthusiastic boy. She put out a hand he did not see, then quickly drew it back, glad that he had not seen it and yet, not knowing why, sorry he had not. "Don't say that," she murmured, "can't you understand that if people like you go out of these movements you leave them in the hands of the people you detest? That makes things worse, doesn't it?"

"And what if they do get worse?" cried the young man. "What if the Settlement and its charges do go to Ford's mediæval hell? What will it matter to Sirius?" He gave a sharp laugh. "Can't you see yourself what rubbish all this is, what I'm doing and what you're doing, what we're all doing, like water-spiders rushing about on a brook. Here we are, trying to teach women to look after their children in the intervals of charring, and how to feed their babies while they're doing a legal nine-hours' day in a factory. We're trying to make the men sober by letting them live with three children in one room and no place to go but the pub. And when we get them sober we give them Ruskin. Ruskin!" he repeated savagely. "To people who can't read a full column in a paper because it's too long,—because the papers have fed them with paragraphs, given them the habit of mental nips! Mental nips on an empty stomach! No wonder society is sick. And it's not only that. Look at the children the council's feeding; why, we haven't the decency to stand them the breakfast unless they stand the education; you mustn't pauperise their parents. It wouldn't do to leave twopence in the working man's pocket, would it?"

"Aren't you exaggerating?" asked Theresa. "And haven't you got it a little wrong?" She was pitying, moved by his anger. "Isn't it better that they shouldn't have that twopence than go and get drunk at

the pub and," amusement crept into her voice, "become unfit for Ruskin?"

But Huncote was not to be turned. "It's absurd," he cried, "it's all absurd. It's not much we do for children, but what we do we stop at fourteen. Then we let the girls be slaveys in lodging houses and the boys be trained in the intricate art of carrying parcels. Of course it doesn't work; then we rescue them. We send the boys to the colonies, who of course don't thank us, just to get rid of them, to hide it all up nicely. And the fallen girls, it's not many of those we get hold of with our temptations, the washtub and floor-scrubbing, hiding it again. Society is like a dirty armchair with a loose cover: we keep the chair dirty for ever and wash that loose cover so that all may look respectable and nice. We tell the people to have lots of children for the Empire's sake and then relieve the pressure by encouraging infantile mortality."

"Surely . . ."

"Yes, yes, we do encourage infantile mortality, with our low wages and our overcrowding and our labour for mothers. But we're not going to talk about that, we're going to talk about providing work. Work! There's nothing but work in the world; it's less work we want, not more; we want time to think. And then you come and talk to me of ennobling the people and raising their ideals and all that sort of thing, the sort of thing I talk of, that all our class talks of with its long gabbling tongue in its cheek. Yes, we give them lectures on George Borrow, and pictures. Pictures! Look at this!" He took up from the office table a little list and read it. "Here's the list from the picture dealer:

LADY OF SHALOTT	5 doz.
BEATA BEATRIX	1½ doz.

Beatitude is no catch in St. Panwich, you see.

RETURN OF PERSEPHONE	7 doz.
----------------------------	--------

I tell you it's stifling. Pictures, lectures, gymnastics, music . . ."

Theresa came a little nearer, laid upon the desk very long, rather thin hands, and bent towards him without any amusement in her soft eyes. "They wouldn't be any better, would they, without those things? Aren't we bringing into their lives just that something which will make them aware that those lives can become finer? Aren't we showing them what we might get to? Giving them a taste for it so that they may be fit when they get it? It's many miles to Babylon, but you can get there, you know."

Huncote shook his head so miserably that for a moment Theresa felt like an old woman watching a little fevered child that tosses all night in stinging blankets; she felt helpless.

"No," he said, "those aren't the things. It's too early for art. It's wages now, food, privacy, soap, security; that's what they want. Leisure especially, more leisure."

"Give the people a vision," Theresa murmured.

As if to himself, Huncote said: "Yes, a vision of bread and butter."

III

As dead love leaves behind it a memory sometimes strong enough to link those who love no more, so does enthusiasm, burnt out, still yield some warmth. In heavy disgust Huncote set out for the May excursion of the rambling club. This was the particular care of a chubby secretary, who was a Radical, believed in Dickens, in Chesterton, and read Jefferies in the underground. Its mixed membership had geological and botanical aspirations. But it also contained many members who merely wanted something agreeable to do on Saturday afternoons. Heavily then, as if perform-

ing a task, Huncote joined the noisy party at Marylebone. There were various spinsters who in another walk of life would have been Miss Miskins; there were a few elderly clerks, rather gallant, who practised the mazurka in their bedrooms. Some of these had notebooks, and there was a five-shilling kodak in the party. A curate had got in, nobody quite knew how or to whom he belonged. Huncote grew aware of him as an anxious figure on the platform just before the train started, a mass of distressed urgencies who went about asking for his cousin and finally climbed into a smoker and tried to get out when it was too late.

Huncote had travelled rather miserably with Churton, the chubby secretary, and seven members who tried to be cheerful though in the presence of the great. But little by little, as London passed away into villaland where in fluffy meadows stood red and white houses, dotted about like toys, and then very quickly into the soft, rolling plain of Buckinghamshire, a weight fell from his shoulders. The sun, which in London had been fair, was here a conqueror. He felt a new elation as he stepped out with his party along the road which rises swift from the railway to disappear into the mystery of hanging blue sky and bending bough. Already the party was breaking up. The spinsters, at least those who were not partnered by contemporary gallants, formed little groups for quick, excited talk. The sweethearts too were finding isolation, while the youngest girls, recruited from the teashop or the pickle factory, were already growing rowdy with the van boys and the more experienced ones who sold the *Star* and the *Evening News*. Indeed, as they entered Chalfont St. Giles, the younger botanists were getting out of hand. It amused Huncote, but then anything would have amused him just then, when again he felt free, just because the sun shone and he was as a dog blinking in it. The party collected at Milton's Cottage which

132 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

they stormed in defiance of its custodian, and here the curate took the opportunity to ask Huncote what had become of his cousin, Miss Brandon. The secretary was found; no Miss Brandon was known. The curate remained obstinate.

"She said I was to meet her on the platform," he repeated endlessly. He looked distressfully at the officials; he was the sort of curate of whom Fighting Bill did not approve; he looked as if he had been dry-cleaned. The secretary's intelligence was stirred; he made swift enquiries.

"But," cried the curate, "you're the Society for the Revival of Mysticism, aren't you?"

He was undeceived. Much later only was it discovered that he had come to the wrong platform and been unjustly recruited. All that afternoon he remained with the party, reproachfully conversing, like a remorseful shadow.

Until then it had been an ordinary ramble. Huncote had at last shaken off his weariness, his feeling that it would be impossible to get the right people to do what was wanted. He had talked to a few members he did not know; he had nodded to Miss Groby who, he thought, looked dreadful that day in a long green coat, a large hat swarming with congregated roses above equally swarming black curls. And as they climbed over the stiles with many shy squealings and gallant guffaws, he had had quite a long conversation with Hilda who remembered her dance partner better than he did her. They had gone side by side through the fields while Hilda told him a long, long story about a girl who had borrowed her best hat.

"You see what I mean, it wasn't that she borrowed my hat that mattered, it was what she said."

"What did she say?" asked Huncote, rather distraught.

"But I've just been tellin' you," said Hilda, aggrieved.

"It's so complicated," said Huncote.

"Don't see it is," said Hilda tartly. "That Milly, don't you understand I lent her the hat to go and see her people at Chigwell, and her sister says to her, 'That's a dandy hat you've got, Milly,' and Milly says, 'Yes, it ain't bad, I got it for one-and-eleven.' She'd got a nerve! seeing I paid eight-and-six, saved it up too at threepence a week."

"I don't see how . . ." murmured Huncote.

Hilda was by now shrilly exasperated, especially as she had slipped on a furrow and hurt her ankle.

"No, of course, a man wouldn't." She was for a moment forgetting the stupendous difference in their rank. "Only Milly's sister, she meets me out with a gentleman friend the other day and she says: 'Hallo, you've borrowed Milly's hat!' 'No, I haven't,' I says. She says, 'Yes, you have,' she says. 'No,' I says, 'she borrowed it from me.' 'Ah,' she says, 'now I see, that's the one that corst one-and-eleven, ain't it? Looks it too, don't it?' And would you believe it, my gentleman friend began to laugh, like you," she added savagely, for Huncote too laughed. At last it dawned upon him what a girl might feel when an eight-and-sixpenny hat was publicly advertised as worth one-and-eleven.

It was some time before they caught up the rest of the party; still Hilda went on raging about the price of hats, and a pale blue mist, like the heart of a shell, settled unseen of her upon the shadowy crests of the rising meadows.

In the wood where for a moment the party had collected to decide upon a direction, the scattering began again. They were to circle the wood and then go cross-ways, so as to be back at Chalfont St. Giles where a great tea would at five o'clock be spread at the "Pheasant." At first Huncote was associated with two young men. All three cut switches from an elder tree and

went talking of bicycles while the third young man whistled: "Sail Away." It was mysterious in the wood, still alight with young spring leaf and speared everywhere with thin golden shafts of sunlight. Couples could be glimpsed through the trees; now and then Huncote through frail bushes saw the white dress of a girl. She passed swift as a nymph in an ausonian glade. Then suddenly they came upon three girls, two of them known to Huncote only by sight, and Miss Groby, with whom he exchanged a shy smile. It all seemed very easy; without intention Huncote found that one of the young men had gone ahead with one of the girls, presumably to talk of bicycles. Some way behind him he heard upon the crackling wood of the past autumn the footsteps of the other couple, and he was alone with Miss Groby, strangely enough worrying but little as to what he should say. It was she spoke first:

"It's nice here," she said.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Huncote. He took off his hat and fanned himself with it. He looked at her. Yes, she was pretty, he thought, with that look in her eyes, half-thoughtful, half-humble, and that mouth so red, turned back upon the pale honey of her skin. "Why don't you take off your gloves?" he asked. Miss Groby blushed. Something personal had arisen between them. She stopped. She fidgeted a little. "Go on," said Huncote, "take them off; one doesn't wear gloves in the country."

She looked at him a little distrustfully, as if she felt reproved, and very slowly began to pull off her gloves. He smiled at her, so ignorant and callous, not understanding that she did not want a man of his class to see the hands of hers.

As they stood, she so slowly pulling off her gloves, the other couple passed them: The girl was making a daisy chain and as she went threw them an accomplice

glance. Her young man peeled his stick, softly whistling another tune.

At last Miss Groby's gloves were off, and because it had been so complex Huncote looked at her hands. They were not ugly; they were muscular and somewhat thickened, particularly at the joints and the finger tips. And they showed coquetry, for Miss Groby ought to have taken six-and-three-quarter gloves, while the marks round her wrists and on the back of the hands showed that she had forced them into six-and-a-half. They were broad hands, tending to taper; the finger nails, very neglected, were of filbert shape. Huncote looked at them because the little dispute had awakened him to their existence; he liked the pallor of the wrist and the strong over-lay of red and brown on the hands. Miss Groby laughed; she was self-conscious, and that made her silent. So it was Huncote who spoke first, rather patronising.

"D'you often come on these expeditions?"

"I came last year," said Miss Groby, "that was my first year. You see, mother didn't like me running about the country; she said I was too young, I was only eighteen then."

"Ah, yes," said Huncote, who felt absurdly fatherly as she was so young and he felt so old. "Of course, if your mother . . ."

"Mother knows best," said Miss Groby quickly, as if afraid Huncote was going to criticise her. "Mother always says, 'Life's a funny thing, and you never know what'll happen next.' That's true, don't you think?"

The man agreed. "Yes," he said, "it's true, even if it's not very epigrammatic."

Miss Groby looked at him with large admiring eyes. She thought him splendid, so tall and long-limbed and aristocratic with that high wide forehead, and the swept-back fair hair. But an obscure ragging instinct,

half-youthful, half-cockney, made her say: "Good word, epidramatic!"

Suddenly they both laughed. As if laughter, like a magic carpet, had snatched them up, they were in another world, the Palace of Ease. She had made a fool of him, so they could be children together. She prattled on still about her mother, for the subject seemed to fire her, about her mother of whom a picture slowly grew up, always working, it seemed, and always thinking of the children's boots and father's dinner, or tucking one up in bed when one was little. Miss Groby grew quite sentimental as Mrs. Groby developed into the angel of memory, unfailingly laying on the first Sunday of every July some flowers upon the grave of Uncle Tom. Huncote thought it rather wonderful; he had still to learn what the mother means among the poor, where the father is so often drunk and always odorous, heavy, threatening; he thought Mrs. Groby was just Mrs. Groby, instead of understanding that she represented all the mothers of all the young girls such as the one to whom he spoke.

He asked questions.

"What do I do? Oh, all sorts of things. Mother takes in washing, you know; fine washing, of course," she added with a touch of pride, "all done by hand; so I help her with the laces, and the — the —" She grew shy. "Well, anyhow, I've plenty to do. And of course I've to help mother a bit with Muriel and Perce, that's my brother and sister, you know," she prattled on. She had little to say of Muriel, who would soon leave school, but Perce was evoked as a boy already agreeably rakish. "He's a corf drop," said Miss Groby.

They went on slowly through the wood and, little by little, Huncote was led into the Grobys' home. He heard of the father, a stonemason, and heard little more save that he was big and had a red face; and Perce came

up more clearly as the rake when he found out that Perce recently had a bad night at shove halfpenny, while Muriel, it seemed, was quite the lady. He had a vision of the small home, three rooms, in Paradise Row, of very early morning and the father leaving in the greyness, of the children fed and hurried to school. He imagined Mrs. Groby upon her knees, swishing the floor with a wet rag in hands which, he was sure, were large and red and kindly. He imagined Miss Groby too, washing the fine laces, and then, more dimly, her pleasures. He questioned her; she answered him easily enough. There could be no shyness here as they slowly walked around the wood, keeping strictly to the little path of beaten earth by the side of which grew many cuckoo flowers and, here and there, in aloofness, a few bluebells. The day was warm, with some freshness; a cool wind, like the breath of a rejuvenated earth, played softly on their faces. The girl by his side, who talked so freely to him of her concerns, did not jar upon him, for she was not pretending, not trying. She was telling him the plot of a cinema play to which she had been with "a gentleman friend." Curiously he thought of Bert.

"Oh, him?" she said, and suddenly grew shy. "Mr. Caldwell, that is; you know, he was at the dance."

"Yes," said Huncote. He remembered the fierce young socialist and instinctively knew that between him and the girl there was a link. He had to ascertain. "You're going to marry him, aren't you?" Miss Groby's face passed from pale olive to a crimson dusk. Huncote knew he had been clumsy, so he said: "Sorry, I oughtn't to have asked."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," said Miss Groby, rather stately, "but we're not thinking of that, Bert and me. I've known him such a long time; we're such old friends, you see."

Huncote understood; he had lived long enough in

St. Panwich to have heard of these confused relationships. It did not concern him, but it stayed in his mind as typical. He forgot Miss Groby; he saw only the people, the people who seemed to be always working except when they made merry; the people were like youth, crude perhaps, coarse very often, sometimes selfish because they were so young, because man unspoiled by civilisation has no ethical ideas. He thought: "No, no complications, no ideas about religion, just acceptance; no ideas about art and politics, no damned ideas of any kind. Yet we must give them ideas, I suppose."

Miss Groby walked by his side, silent now. She had picked some bluebells and was trying to bind them together with a stalk of grass. She seemed so childish, like her own people. Huncote flung her a sidelong glance: "Yes, a child with no ideas, no theories, no complications. Ideals? Perhaps. Or must not we, whom fortune has favoured, give them ideals?" But suddenly he felt ashamed. "Who was it who should give them ideals? The Platts and the Miss Miskins of this world? Or even he?" He was pharisee enough to think "even" such as he, a man of blind rebellions and feeble habits. He spoke aloud: "Oh, rot! It's not ideals we're giving them, it's conventions. They've got conventions of their own, and all we're doing is to give them the conventions of another class!"

"Beg pardon?" said Miss Groby.

He stared, suddenly aware of her. "Oh," he said, "I was only talking to myself; excuse me."

Miss Groby was on the point of asking him whether he was often taken that way but, as if something of his emotion had passed into her, she remained silent. Swiftly, as the plant rises from the little seed in the fakir's pot, a bond more human, less intellectual formed between them, because he had thought of her as capable of an ideal, because she had caught him in a queer per-

sonal habit. Without purpose they stopped. They were not self-conscious now, though they did not understand each other at all, but they were willing to do without understanding.

The sun was lower then, and they stood in a clearing in the thin wood, at the edge of a deep dell thickly grown with ivy and brambles, all edged with the decaying trunks of big trees. It was a fantastic place this, the heavy moist hollow, and all round it, like guards, the decapitated trunks of trees that were dark and sturdy like stunted giants. The light fell aslant through the leaves, making upon their cheeks patterns like the points of spears. And where the sun touched the girl's cheek it was rich and golden as a pomegranate. She looked at him silent and disturbed, and he saw no more the ugly green cloth coat, the dreadful slum Sunday hat with the many pink roses. Standing like this, her strong hands clasped together, looking up beyond him to the sky that was pale as running water, she seemed wondering and forlorn. But standing before her, looking at her so much more intently than she looked at the sky, he seemed to see her for the first time, with her broad shoulders and her slender hips, to see her shape that was as a young athlete's, the long arms that relieved her breadth, the darkness and the dusky intimacy of her. She stood undisturbed as, feature by feature, he began to know her, the heavy black hair with brown shadows in its waves, the high trustful eyebrows over the languid darkness of the brown eyes. Her nose was straight, small with sensitive if not very well-moulded nostrils. But then he looked at the mouth over the little pointed chin that broadened suddenly to right and left,—the mouth full of curves, with parted, upturned lips and an air of appeal. She was appealing to him now as her class had once done, for an enlightening, a rescue which perhaps he might achieve. The misunderstanding had gone, for as they stood so in

the light which every moment grew deeper in colour, they were conscious less of each other than of the atmosphere they made. He was Perseus, and she the weeping Andromeda.

Quite suddenly the tension was relieved. Miss Groby seemed to listen. Until then they had heard other voices in the wood. Now there were none. She grew self-conscious and, because self-conscious, afraid.

"We'd better be getting on," she said.

Huncote too awoke. "Yes, I s'pose we ought; we'd better go back, but don't let's go back the same way; let's cut across to the right and then beat back."

"I don't mind," said Miss Groby, as if willing to be commanded.

They turned into the wood that was a little thicker beyond the sleepy hollow, under oaks which had been spared. They were natural and young again, and they laughed when Huncote raised sweeping branches so that she might pass and sheltered her with his body from a bush of blackthorn. They did not feel it incongruous, either of them, that he, the delicate one, the gentleman, should interpose that over-tended body between the blackthorn and her capable sturdiness. For a long time they went like this until they turned again towards the right along yet another path that seemed to lead towards Chalfont St. Giles. They followed it for a long time along its windings, through hollows where the leaves of the dead autumn smelt sweet and old. But Miss Groby cried out when suddenly it brought them back to the hollow that slept deeper as the coming twilight fell dim.

"Oh!" she cried, "why we've got right back!"

Indeed they had come back to the place where for a moment weeping Andromeda had stood beseeching in the sun. But that moment did not recur to Miss Groby.

"Oh," she cried, "we'll be so late. We must go back the other way. Oh, what shall we do?"

"It'll be all right," said Huncote, "it can't be much more than half an hour from here."

"Oh, I'm sure it's more," said Miss Groby, "we must hurry." And she walked ahead along the path very quickly, Huncote apologising too profusely, for he was embarrassed. As they went, unable to talk because Miss Groby was too preoccupied, she thought revengeful thoughts. She knew what they would say when they got back. "It would be different," she grumbled, "if we'd found the others."

Huncote half understood. He guessed that the people would say they had lost themselves on purpose, but he did not know the thoughts in Miss Groby's brain; he did not realise her suspicion of him, of his class, of his motives. If she had spoken aloud he would have heard:

"It's all very well, but he's a swell. Shouldn't wonder if there isn't a last train, and it's all a put-up job." All the ease had gone and the passing glory faded. Here was no longer Andromeda, shining-clad, but the puritanical, fearful, rigid young girl of the superior slums. Night was coming; she drew close about herself the ugly green cloth coat, and as if in a magic mantle the vision disappeared.

When at last they rejoined the party nothing was said. He was conscious of some sniggering and of couples nudging each other, of Churton with raised eyebrows. But Huncote was still so entire an idealist that he did not understand when Hilda, fatly blowing herself out like a young and pretty turkey cock, turned away from him with pink chin uplifted. In the train he was at first aglow with the memory, while the others discussed the success of the ramble from the Committee's point of view. He had been happy, but did not know why. Because he had been near earth, he thought; it was too early for him to think that it was because he had been near the earth maiden. Then he grew conscious

that somebody questioned him; it was the curate. He remembered.

"I hope you managed to have a decent afternoon after all," he said.

"Well," replied the curate dubiously, "it was not quite what I expected. We had a very pleasant tea at the 'Pheasant', very pleasant indeed, but I don't know what my cousin will say."

"Let me see," said Huncote, "she belongs to the Society for the Revival of Mysticism, doesn't she?"

"Yes," said the curate, full of his sin of omission. "I don't know what she'll say. You see, the society's been influenced by the Irish revival, and we were to go to Rickmansworth woods to try and find fairies."

Half an hour later, at Marylebone, it was he who stopped the bus for Miss Groby and a girl friend. As they drove off his heart was delighted. Miss Groby had the inside corner seat; it was dark, and the lamp just above her head brought out her dusky beauty. As the bus moved she smiled, and he saw a quality he had not known before in the softness of her sidelong look.

PART THE SECOND
LEAVES OF YGGDRASIL

To morowe ye shal on hunting fare,
And ryde, my doughter, in a chare:
It shal be covered with velvet reede,
And clothes of fyne golde al about your hed.
With damske white and asure blewe,
Wel dyapred with lyllyes newe.

(The Squyer of Low Degre.)

CHAPTER THE FIRST

THERESA

I

THE summer breathed fragrant through the pipes of June. The people that once had been grey with dust and weariness went light as to the dance. In London June had come without youth, had come as June does in cities, mature as a beloved courtesan and yet beautiful. It was London June and the fullness of summer, the spring forgot; June riotous, June flower-grown, June ignorant of meadows flecked with white and madder daisies, sumptuous London June, fashionable even in the slums, opulent June crowned with crimson poppies, June smart with a golden carnation in her buttonhole or, more audacious, the vivid velvety quills of a dahlia. And the June people every year born, that every year die as again the fog falls, were there; the men lighter clad, a few of them already healthily browning; the women flushed like those white poppies that blush when the sun kisses them. A true heat already in the air and the warm scents of summer, of earth, of leather, of man, of all things from which the sun draws their essence. From human creatures it drew it too, and Huncote felt it as all men. He was lighter, he was gayer, and he believed in the things which at bottom he knew were untrue; so he was happy. Because he was happy he made others happy; because he loved them better they learnt to love him. They had begun to know him at last in St. Panwich, or perhaps it was the summer that served him as a naturalisation certificate. St. Panwich seemed to have decided to overlook what

it did not like, his slight stiffness, his hesitations, and those unaccountable silences during which St. Panwich knew that Huncote was getting at it. St. Panwich forgave as it prepared to lumber into the dance to the pipes of June. One evening at the Progress Arms, where the women had been admitted for good after a final conflict with Miss Miskin and Mrs. Ramsey, he found quite a little crowd. He wondered at it, not realising that a few of the slightly civilised (that is to say, Settled) men had learnt to prefer non-alcoholics in the summer. It was a curious evening, for the barmaid, still respectable, was heard to remark to a man who leant over the bar and whispered to her: "No fear!" Huncote was curious to know what the man had whispered; he never found out. But still it remained evident that a new wind blew over the placid waters, for in the winter she certainly would have said: "I wouldn't dream of such a thing!"

But still he was not after all to be gay and easy. He was paying the penalty of success. The ramble had been so much appreciated, the tea in the Elizabethan garden of the "Pheasant" so satisfying, that Huncote was acclaimed as the procurator of popular pleasures. It had really been a triumph, for it had impressed even the accidental curate; a few days later he gave up fairies and shyly sidled into the rambling club. Now the summer social, the Great Summer Social, was placed upon Huncote's shoulders, whether as the imperial purple or as a shirt of Nessus he could not tell. He did not mind; he liked the bustle in the air; it made him collect helpers, and doing this gave him his first opportunity of seeing Miss Groby again. She came one evening, just for an hour, to address envelopes while Huncote walked about the room, very busily doing nothing and trying to remember all the things he would have to do. She had changed; Miss Groby was just one of the seven or eight girls who came one evening to

address envelopes to the members. She looked up at him, smiled without self-consciousness; and he was awkward, as if forgetting for a moment what she was. For she did not come up in high relief in the exuberance of summer as she had done in spring, smiling on its way to the grave. Besides he was oppressed by all sorts of questions, by motorbus arrangements with a company that seemed disinclined to carry his party, by an endless haggles with the inn at Colin Deep. On the eve of the social there was a mustard and cress famine, or his supply had been sent to Birmingham by mistake, or something.

"Well," said Theresa, after hearing him dictate a febrile telegram about the mustard and cress, "tell me the worst. Must it be parsley?"

He looked at her rather miserably. "I wish you wouldn't laugh at me," he said, "I'm fed up with this thing." He grew resentful. "You're always laughing at me."

Theresa looked at him as if to say: "Very good for you too," but she felt sorry for him and thought he looked pale, not strong. Because she was older it affected her. "I've got to laugh at you," she said, at last. "One's got to now and then if one doesn't want to cry."

"There's nothing to cry about in me," said Huncote. "At least I hope not."

They laughed together a little nervously. Then his weariness seized him again.

"Oh," he said, "I'm so tired."

Theresa grew maternal.

"Look here," she said, "you've done enough. I've been here all the afternoon, and I think you've telephoned about fifteen times, including the wrong numbers; and every time I heard you speak it's been about more chairs, or else shrimps, or something equally poetic. You've done, haven't you?"

148 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

"Yes, but . . ."

"Yes, but you're only fussing now. You're going on and on, doing little things over and over again and making yourself hysterical. You're like the people who've been seasick; when they've been as sick as they ought to be they try to begin it all over again. Not a romantic comparison, is it? Well, you've been quite romantic enough to-day in the interests of the people and of fuss in general. What you're going to do now is to come out with me and have some air. Walk all the way back to my flat and talk about anything but shrimp-paste."

"All right," said Huncote, "and don't blame me to-morrow if they send Carter Paterson's vans instead of omnibuses with an ostentatious 'Private' marked on them."

They walked all the way from the Settlement, through the little lanes of Penton Town where they were silent and rather grave. He disturbed Theresa, this aimless young man; she hardly knew what to say to him. So she stopped in front of a barrow and bought a pound of cherries.

"We'll eat them as we go," she said. Huncote took one with a delirious sense of unconventionality and ate it in the street. "Here," said Theresa, holding out a handful to a small girl who was just very large black eyes with a child round them. The child took the fruit without thanks. Perhaps she had never been given cherries before and could not believe they were meant for her.

"Poor kid!" said Theresa, as they walked on, "she looked quite frightened."

But at that moment they heard behind them a cry. Huncote turned just in time to catch a decayed cherry full in the face. "Good luck to you!" yelled the little girl. "Ain't got no rice."

They laughed as they went on, but the laughter was

self-conscious and awkward. It was a shame, Huncote thought, that whenever he walked with a woman he should be intimately associated with her in the popular mind. It was a long walk, through Penton Town and then along Marylebone Road, to St. Mary's Mansions where Miss Underwood lived. Much later in the evening, Huncote wondered what they had talked about; he could not remember very well. That talk had a quality different from other conversations; there had been no discussion of social ideas or even of artistic ideas. They had told each other a little about themselves, as if they soliloquised rather than conversed. He learnt that Theresa lived alone, having lost her parents; he gathered she had a small income. Only one question did he put, and the answer he remembered. "I say," he asked, rather abruptly, "d'you find that the Settlement and all that fills your life enough?"

She did not answer for a while; then she said: "Well, you see, one must do something. Oh, I mean more than that; I'm not going to pretend that the people are nice." She smiled. "One notices them in the summer. I don't know that I think one can do so much for them after all, but I think one can do a lot for one's own soul by loving them."

In reply he had, being still enthralled by his newly recovered faith in the splendour of the people, been vaguely enthusiastic; but he did not like himself. He felt materialistic and shrill by the side of this serenity. When they reached St. Mary's Mansions Theresa said:

"Come in for a moment, won't you?"

"Oh — I —" he hesitated.

"Yes, of course you must come up," she said decidedly. "You look fagged out; come up and have a whisky and soda." He followed.

The flat into which he was shown by an elderly maid surprised him. He had never thought of the probable

surroundings of Miss Underwood, but if he had been asked he would have expected something more arty, something with a pre-Raphaelite touch. He was disappointed and yet not. The flat, at the very top of the mansions, looked rather severe but comfortable. In the drawing-room where now he sat were flowered chintzes, not at all advanced but very white and pink. Upon the pale yellow walls were a few black-and-white sketches, an oil not at all extreme. There were a few books upon the chairs, a great many more in a bookcase. He read the titles of a few of them later: *Religio Medici*, *The Golden Treasury*, also a few novels by Mrs. Humphry Ward. It was incoherent, careless, or catholic, he did not know which. They did not speak at first as he sat, drinking the whisky and soda. He did not want to, for really he was tired, and Theresa seemed to know it as she silently watched him, fanning herself with a copy of the *Studio*. She looked at him as if thinking: "There, my little boy, now you'll be all right." After a while she said: "You're not in a hurry, are you? D'you like music?"

He nodded. Unasked she went to the piano and soon there came from it clear tunes, skipping tunes that sounded as if they were being played far away. In a break he went up to the music cabinet and there he found many people of whom he had only heard, Lulli, Rameau, Couperin Le Grand. She played on, not demanding his attention, now a fugue.

He said: "I like that music; it's like time, without a beginning or an end."

"Shade of Bach!" she mocked. "How pleased you must be if in this minute, as Maeterlinck thinks, you live again."

"I wish you wouldn't laugh at me," he said.

She was perverse. "I will laugh at you," she cried. "Listen! listen!" and she went off into shrill peals. "There, now you're offended. Well, you'd better go

if you're offended. Go on, make a noise like a hoop and roll away, as the Americans say."

Huncote went towards the door, espousing her mood, but before he reached it, "Not that door," cried Miss Underwood. "That leads into an empty room."

"An empty room? A ghost closet? You fire me. I won't go until I've investigated it."

"Investigate," said Miss Underwood. "You won't find anything except a trunk or two, and many things which Elizabeth will not throw away. You see, this flat has five rooms, and I can't live in five rooms because there's only one me; so I've only furnished two and let Elizabeth do what she likes in the others. There are two rooms quite empty, but you've no idea how nice it is to have hardly any rooms and hardly any furniture, and hardly anything except yourself."

Huncote looked thoughtful, but suddenly, as if she felt the link had grown too personal, she broke off.

"You don't want to hear about my household; let me play you something else."

She went back to the piano and joltily she played yet another of those tripping little tunes. "Les Trésorières Surannées," she said, as she played, "in other words, the superannuated treasuresses."

He did not like her feeble humour; yet she pleased him. He was so tired of being serious, and Theresa made everything seem passing, artificial, and yet charming, to make a world like a picture by Watteau, a dance of velvet and satins among shepherds and sheep. As she played she thought of him and of herself. She thought of the sweetness of her own independence and yet its emptiness. She thought of him and grew rather superior; she felt so much older, a full three years, while he seemed so enthusiastic and so young. That was delightful and absurd. As she played she glanced sideways at him; she thought it a shame that such a

152 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

nice child should be worried by practical things and its own fancies.

As he went down the stairs he felt rested, yet not at rest. She was still playing and all the way down there accompanied him the more and more distant trippings of "Les Trésorières Surannées."

II

The summer social moved with the splendid ease of those great machines which, considered while at rest, look as if they could not possibly move. To Huncote it seemed an immense success, for he had expected it to be a failure. At half-past one on the third Saturday in July, eight motorbusses, in a side street near King's Cross, received the four hundred roysterers. In defiance of County Council regulations they stacked themselves inside and out, the elders hustled, not minding and wiping their heads with great satisfaction; the young couples seated upon the floor, crushed up very close; odd gaps, such as spaces between adult feet, were filled in with children. It was difficult to make out what was happening, for at the entrance to every bus the official in charge was having continuous rows with the people who had forgotten the tickets for which they had paid fourpence a month. Huncote had to intervene in one of the rows which Platt was conducting, for the prospective candidate had seen to it that the outside of his bus was filled with men and presumably voters; an old woman, with a small boy, a string-bag, three bottles and a dog, was determined to force her way in.

"Oh, surely," said Platt, suavely, "you'd much rather go with the other ladies?"

"I paid for my seat," said the old woman. Then she snapped the fasteners of her mouth and shoved Platt with her shoulder.

"Get on with it, mother," grumbled a man behind

who also wanted to enter the bus. She turned on him. "I paid for my seat," and once more shoved the intervening Platt. Platt was in agony; the man was a voter, and suffrage had not yet come in. Then the man shoved the old woman, and the old woman shoved Platt. And Platt fell on a man inside who shoved him back upon the old woman, who called him a coward. As Huncote arrived the old woman burst into tears; the dog tried to hang itself with its lead; the small boy dropped one of the bottles and set up a piercing howl . . .

Somehow the busses got off, their tops flowering with little girls in pink, and blue, and white, and little boys with persistent mouth-organs, and men with pipes who would sit on the front seats and tell those at the back what they thought of them when the ash blew back and they complained. In single file the eight busses rumbled past King's Cross towards the Euston Road, the mouth-organs every moment shriller to the tune of "Everybody's Doing It." At Euston the busses stopped to let pass a volunteer regiment, route marching to Finchley. The military influence, potent as always, affected the little girls so that Huncote could hear them above his head executing brisk and presumably warlike dances upon the roof.

The busses pounded on through Edgware Road. Above, as inner London fell away, the sky passed from pallor to a heavier blue. The passers-by stopped to smile while the revellers waved. Huncote was hot but content. It was going after all, as if the splendid careless merriment of the people were carrying him. He was alone with them too, for there was with him only the group captain, Miss Cashell. He tried to talk to her, but she smiled brightly and could not reply, for on the other side a woman with two babies was raucously entertaining her with a story of which, now and then, through the rumblings of the bus, Huncote caught a recurrent phrase: "'E wouldn't 'ave died if it 'adn't

been for the bloater." He did not enquire further, he was too hot, rather tired, rather pleased to think that all was going well. And all was going well. Now they were in the open country before Edgware and, looking out, he could see the little girls standing up in the bus just behind, and above the noise of the bus he could hear their song: "Everybody's doing it, doing it, doing it, Everybody's doing it now."

There was a break. His bus stopped, and then all the other busses; officially leaping out he found a fierce altercation taking place on bus Number Two between the chauffeur and the father of a small boy, because the small boy, by climbing over the rail and lying on his stomach on the hood, while two other small boys held his feet, persisted in tickling the chauffeur's nose with a twist of paper tied to a string. The altercation was being conducted amid uproarious merriment.

Still, all seemed to settle down; the little boy, after having been vindicated by his father, was vigorously smacked. And the social began to take its social form of splitting up into couples, while large and elderly groups formed in circles on the grass round the bottles which had been brought lest the inn should prove stingy. Cockshies had been installed, and Huncote found himself inciting the little boys to test their skill, while Theresa was busy with a number of unattached women and their babies, trying to lead them away from the grounds of the "Woolpack" towards the toy brook along which hid forget-me-nots. She smiled at him as she passed but could not speak, for she was listening to the woman with the two babies who had travelled in Huncote's bus. He caught the phrase: "Got a chill on her lungs and died on the Toosday."

He had nothing to do; he missed having something to do because he had done so much. The party had settled into its own merriment: groups of men were engaged with pipes and arguments as to where they would

get the best beer, or the time it took by tram from Crapp's Lane to Westminster Bridge, while the women were being confidential, presumably obstetric, and the couples dived for forget-me-nots with many squeaks when ankles showed, and terrors of Hero lest Leander should drown.

Still he felt he had to do something, so he mixed with the people; he dodged Beesby, for he saw in his face that an obscure resentment against something was forming in his brain, and he knew that Beesby's resentments were lengthy. He looked at a party of girls who had no "young gentlemen" and were trying to look select and superior to show they could have had them if they wanted. Vaguely he wondered whether Miss Groby was among them. She was not. He gave them a little smile and went on. The grounds of the "Woolpack" were broad and beautiful, for the innkeeper had not enough money to make a garden, and so he had enclosed broad meadows of ragged, strong grass all flecked with wild flowers. And there were even big trees between which the brushwood grew reckless and rebelled against the arbours into which it had been twisted. He was shy near these arbours where already couples were flirting in their way, he not looking at the girl and kicking holes in the turf, she shrill or gabbling, giving him a playful nudge from time to time. The couples impressed him. But somehow as he went on to the end of the grounds where there was quite a large group arguing as to whether a certain elm was a beech, he found himself looking for somebody. He wanted to talk to somebody, and they were all so busy; there were so many he did not know. It would be nice, he thought, if he could find Miss Groby. Unconsciously he began to look for her; he went beyond the groups, he went to the cockshies, to the bowling-green where he found Hilda teaching a young man. He passed on hurriedly, answering with a smile the quite distinct smile of Hilda.

He even went into the "Woolpack", telling himself that he must have a look at the refreshments: Miss Groby was not there. It troubled him somehow, and he did not know what to do. He did not like to ask Mrs. Ramsey who had just come out with a long list in her hand. Mrs. Ramsey would think — well, he knew the sort of thing Mrs. Ramsey generally thought. So he turned back into the social, telling himself that she must be somewhere and not asking himself why he wanted to find her. But at the bowling-green Hilda suddenly abandoned the education of the young man and with elaborate carelessness strolled away just in front of Huncote: the nymph eluding the satyr, but not running very fast.

Then she turned and, smiling, waited for him as if it were all arranged. He hesitated; of course he must talk to her. "Isn't it pretty?" he said. "Don't you like the country?"

"Oo I do," said Hilda fervently. Then with meaning: "Is that all there is of it, the garden I mean?"

"All what?" asked Huncote, not understanding.

She pointed to the arbours. "Can't one go further than that?"

"Oh, yes," said Huncote, still unsuspecting. "Haven't you been?"

"No," said Hilda, "I don't know the way out."

Still obliging he showed her. They hesitated at the gate, for Hilda wondered whether it was quite ladylike to lead; then she created a rapturous smile and said:

"Ain't it lovely?"

There was no gainsaying that, for before them the meadow heaved and fell in the haze of heat as if it breathed. The lips of the dogroses opened as in a smile.

"We might have a look round," said Hilda vaguely.

The plump pink cheeks developed dimples, and the blue eyes a roguish air. Hilda had watched the way in which Huncote and Miss Groby had got lost and,

well, it was so easy to get lost. He did not understand, he was not thinking of her just then, for where the meadow ended and where, beyond the palings, another began, was a deep cleft as if a ditch had fallen in. In the sun its sides were brilliant white and vivid rust. It was not the sleepy hollow, but still it made him think of that other hollow, silent and brooding under the heavy mournfulness of the hanging trees, where not so long ago and for a second, through an ugly green cloth coat, he had seen the shining flanks of chained Andromeda. Then he dragged himself out of his dream.

"What?" he said. "Oh, I'd love to, but I've got to go back."

A burlesque preoccupation seized him and he smiled. "Now I come to think of it, I've forgotten to enquire about the mustard and cress." He left her suddenly to return to the grounds, oppressed by his desire though half unconscious of it. But he did not find Miss Groby. To satisfy his conscience he enquired about the mustard and cress; he even inspected the sandwiches; he was not thinking of them, but wondering only where she was. Through the open windows on the dusty air came the song of the social again: "Everybody's doing it, doing it, doing it, Everybody's doing it now."

It was much later in the afternoon. He had had tea with Theresa, a young man speechless before her magnificence, her special protégée, still with her two babies, and some old people suffering greatly from the heat in their black clothes. The conversation had limits, rested mainly on the diseases which had afflicted regrettably numerous relations. He went away at last; he wanted to be alone. He skirted the arbours, all tenanted now; he passed the elm (or beech); here was a place that no one had been to that day, it seemed: a broken gate, a sloping path and a ditch, dry and sweet-scented, that bent back behind the line of the lovers' arbours. With a sigh of content he climbed down into the ditch, lit his

pipe and for a moment thought of nothing. Then above from one of the arbours came a voice he knew, Hilda's. He heard another voice, a girl's. Hilda was being reminiscent, it seemed; he was not ashamed to eavesdrop; instinctively he felt that Hilda's secrets would not be much.

" 'Young feller,' I says, 'what d'yer take me for?' He says something about the most charming lady of all, or charming lady, I forgit. 'Op it,' I says."

"And did he?" asked the other voice.

There was a giggle. "Well, yer know, 'e wasn't bad." Another giggle. "Dark, yer know, and French. 'E 'ad a funny name, 'e 'ad; Cadress, 'e said, or something."

In reply to a question: "Well, p'raps it wasn't 'is real name, I d'no. Asked me to call 'im Loosian."

Huncote smiled. He was still too innocent to understand, but Hilda was shamelessly, indeed rather vain-gloriously retailing an adventure of the street. "Asked me to meet 'im, but 'e couldn't 'ardly manage evenings. Sounds marriedified, I said." Then yet another phrase reached him: "Those Frenchies, they *are* mustard!" An interval and then shockedly: "No fear, wot d'yer take me for?"

He told himself that he ought to move away. He was repelled, for Hilda's voice, carefully managed when she spoke to him, was shrill, and her grammar beyond leashing. But it seemed so trifling, and he was comfortable with his back against the dry scented grass and the smoke from his pipe rising in gentle spirals, opaline against the rich blue sky. But suddenly he was startled by hearing his own name. Then Hilda: "That dummy? I don't think! Besides, 'e's mashed on Sue." He listened. Could not even think of running away, besides . . . But his uncertainty was at once dispelled, for evidently the other girl had asked a question. "Don't know Sue?" said Hilda. "Sue Groby, the

one with a face like a bit o' cheddar. She's not 'ere terday, got a pain in 'er stumuk or something." Another pause during which a curious excitement that made his heart beat invaded the young man's body. He heard the beginning of another phrase: "They said they got lorst in the wood. Lorst? I don't think! Tell yer wot . . ." The rest was whispers and giggles, but he had recovered self-control. With infinite caution he stood up, crept out of the ditch. His instinct was to return to the party and hide in it, but Hilda might see him go past, and it would be dreadful if she knew that he knew, though, of course, it was all nonsense. So he turned, intending to skirt the outer meadow and to re-enter the "Woolpack" by the main gate. But, as he passed, he stopped for a moment to look at the hollow in which now the rays of the sloping sun made patches of brass. From here he could not hear the party any more and nothing indeed, except far away the slow tinkle of a bell at some cow's neck. In the silence and the solitude of it memory drew a veil over his eyes, and for a second he saw again the sleepy hollow, with the cropped stems of the giant trees and the air of eternal dream and sorrow, himself somehow raised in an amazed delight.

But in the grounds where now games were being played, leapfrog by little boys who by surreptitious pinches had forced the little girls into service, and wild blindman's buff by elders who were not very old, his mood changed. This was abominable, he thought; it was ridiculous that he should be associated with a girl like Sue. His thoughts paused for a moment. He liked that name, its suggestion of faithfulness and earth, but he was too angry, too disturbed to dally. He realised that Hilda must have talked to others or would do so; doubtless he was the laughing-stock of the picnic. Doubtless too they thought he was mooning about looking for her. She was not there, he reflected; she might

be ill, and he thrust back a feeling of disquiet and anxiety. He did that easily, for he was disliking Sue; he blamed her for what had happened. So great grew his turmoil that when at last later, the social done, he found himself on the top front seat of one of the busses, side by side with Theresa, he was silent. She looked at him inquisitively; she knew that something had ruffled him and was sorry. Suddenly she bent a little closer towards him: when he looked at her, a little to his surprise, the soft, dark eyes were not mocking but tender.

"Tell me," she murmured, "perhaps it's not as bad as you think."

He had no instinct of reserve just then, and in a few words told her. But his phrases were broken, as if he were ashamed and angry, till at last Theresa had to laugh at him a little.

"Don't take it to heart," she said. "In the work you do that sort of thing's always being said; it's nothing." He looked so unconvinced and wretched that she grew airily cynical. "It'll give you more power," she said. "All Sue's rivals will work for you like the very devil to try and cut her out."

He did not answer; Theresa shocked him in those moods, for he was young and still earnest.

III

When Theresa stepped off near the canal, a few minutes' walk from her flat, she did not go home by the quickest way. She walked slowly down the western bank, turned along Warwick Avenue, then, still slowly, back again until she reached the respectable mediocrity of Howley Place. She was thinking, and the soft mouth drooped a little in every curve. Very slowly she climbed the stairs to her home. She was unhappy. It was an awful shame, she felt, that he should be troubled

like this. Meditatively, in her bedroom, as she took off her hat and made up a fragrant wash with which to remove the dust of the afternoon, she told herself that this sort of thing might drive him out of his work, and what a pity — for the Settlement. She paused in her preparations, wondering whether she could help him, shield his over-great sensitiveness with a wisdom more worldly. She smiled and spoke aloud: "How silly of me! I'm thinking of him as if I were his mother." She reflected that after all she was about three years older, twenty-six, nearly twenty-seven, and actually so much older. Then another mood took her; quickly she went up to the dressing-table and tilted the broad mirror. She remained for a moment resting upon her spread hands, gazing into the mirror that threw back the long slimness of her arms and the whiteness of a neck perhaps too slender. She was knowing herself for the first time, it seemed, looking as if at a stranger, at her thick, straight dark hair, her eyes so melancholic and too large, at the mouth with curves that even then were merry. She remained so for a long time, examining as a critic the pallor of her skin, the shape of her rather long cheeks. Her thoughts wandered. "I don't think he ought to have told me," she reflected. And again returned to the picture in the looking-glass. At last, for the first time in her life, Theresa Underwood looked into her own eyes, smiled at her own lips, and found charm in the creature that faced her.

"Of course," she said aloud to the graceful thing in the looking-glass, "of course it's all nonsense what that girl said." The creature in the looking-glass laughed as if it agreed, and as it laughed its long white throat swelled and was beautiful indeed as the stem of a lily embraced of the wind.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

THE DAY DREAM

I

MISS GROBY was making faces in the mirror as she put her hair straight. This proved her femininity. It was cracked, which disturbed Mrs. Groby. "That'll bring bad luck," she said. But as it was Miss Groby's mirror and she must choose between another and some gloves she wanted badly, the portent of evil remained on the wall. Miss Groby adjusted the many black curls upon her forehead; she pulled down into her belt the cotton blouse and was for a moment discontented with her petticoats which made bunches upon her hips. She thought of the advertisements of silk knickers and sighed; then she pulled herself up: somehow these advertisements looked fast, and Miss Groby was proper. Also she liked what she could see of her figure; she turned, trying to see more of it; she did not know that her eyes were not trained so as to realise all its young beauty. Still she backed away, raising her skirt a little to the right and left as if to curtsy. She grew aware of her mother in the doorway. "Somebody's sprucing herself up," said Mrs. Groby comfortably. She smiled. She was an agreeable faded woman of about fifty, with fairish hair drawn away rather tight from her forehead; she stood in her familiar attitude, hands clasped upon her apron. Miss Groby flung her a smile. Mrs. Groby continued amiably to chaff her. "Looks as if Mr. Right had come along," she remarked over Miss Groby's head. "Wait till Bert comes; I'll tell on yer!"

Miss Groby laughed; she was not afraid of her

mother. Indeed she changed her boots for another pair the heels of which were less worn. Mrs. Groby watched her affectionately. "Arsk yer old mother ter the wedding," she went on, "it's a wedding sure enough; fine feathers make fine birds."

"Don't be silly, mother," said Miss Groby. She adjusted her hat carefully on the very back of her head, kissed her mother on the cheek and went out. When she had gone Mrs. Groby inspected the room, which was in disorder, as if Sue had dressed hurriedly. The boots, notably, looked disreputable as if Sue had flung them down like a challenge. Mrs. Groby collected the boots, put everything straight, and looked at the room with satisfaction. There was a large bed for Sue and Muriel, a wash-handstand with a short leg remedied by a tile. These, with a chest of drawers that one had to fight before one could get its drawers open, and some chairs that had (very long ago) dwelt in marble halls, were the necessities. The luxuries comprised: over the mantelpiece a coloured Christmas supplement of the *Illustrated London News* in which a policeman with mutton-chop whiskers stopped the traffic for "His Majesty, the Baby." On the right, a picture of Miss Gertie Millar; on the left, the mourning card of Great-aunt Elizabeth. Upon the mantelpiece was a scattered collection of Sue's treasures, a Goss mug from Hastings, a picture postcard in which a young couple that looked like wax-works floated, together with a chair, in a cloud of flowers. On the wall beside the bed was an immense sampler with the letters "F.C." in the corner: a present from Mrs. Groby's mother. Sue had enlivened its antiquity by nailing under it another picture postcard whose poetry touched her:

"When hand in hand we two go roaming
Through memories of long ago,
And of life we have reached the gloaming,
You'll be so glad you didn't say: 'No.'"

"Well, well," said Mrs. Groby aloud, "girls will be girls!"

II

It was not far from Paradise Row to the Settlement, but Sue walked quickly as she always did when alone. She was self-conscious alone. She did not even stop to look into the picture postcard shops, for she would not like to be caught by a friend looking at a vulgar exhibition. Two girls together . . . that was different; one could nudge the other and always pretend it was the other who stopped. Besides, she was in a hurry, and she delayed only for one moment to buy a pennyworth of chocolates which she munched all the way to the Settlement. At the corner of the High Street she was tempted to stop because a horse had fallen across the tram lines. A fallen horse always gave her beautiful thrills, half of pity and half of desire that somebody should be kicked: sensationalism. But that day she was purposeful without knowing it, urged on unawares. One of the young fellows from Bubwith's, who had come out ostensibly to inspect the windows, wished her good evening. She raised her chin and walked on without looking back. Not to-night, she thought. It would not have been much if it had been to-night: Sue had had her flirtations, many of them, flirtations of the "no-fear" and "don't-make-so-free" kind, begun at fourteen on monkey parade at the northern end of High Street, but they never developed into much more than a walk in Finsbury Park.

And so, broad shouldered, decision in her sturdy limbs, clear eyes placid and purposeful, she knocked at the door of Huncote's office.

He was sitting there, doing nothing. He was tired. The events at the social had disturbed him and, in spite of Theresa's sympathy, he found it difficult to go on

with his work. He had thought of giving it up, had not done so because there was nothing else to do. He had decided to avoid Miss Groby so as to keep down the scandal; then, in a moment of enthusiasm, he had decided to face it out. Also he had met with the minor troubles of office: all that afternoon one of the dilly-dallytantes had been with him, explaining to him that he did not understand the elemental nature of the people. It was one of the young novelists, one of the young novelists who marry respectably but write an annual novel to induce other people to abandon the civil service, sell potatoes on a barrow, and make illegal love to duchesses and cooks. A very tiring young man. So, wearily, he said: "Come in."

Sue came in boldly, throwing out her figure, as if saying: "Don't you give me none of your cheek," but at once found herself bashful. The man was quite as bashful. The emotions of the past week crystallised: his discomfort because their names were coupled, the dislike he had conceived of her, the memory of the silent hollow. And she who had been so angry because on the day of the social an awful cold caused her to miss what she thought was the social, what she would not own was possible adventure, felt coy. She stood before him, knotting and unknotting her fingers. But the tension was short. Huncote smiled and said: "Good evening." And she: "I hope you don't mind me coming like this?"

"Oh, no, of course not," said Huncote. Then he wondered why she came.

"It's like this," said Sue hurriedly. "There's an old lady down our street who wants a picture. She came in the other night to see mother, and she did look at that one you gave me. You know, all those girls on the staircase."

"Is that the one she wants?" asked Huncote.

"Well, she didn't ask for one exactly; she just looked

and looked, couldn't take her eyes off it, and so I thought —" She stopped.

"Oh," said Huncote. He was touched. Miss Groby then had not waited for the old woman to ask; she had read the hunger in the old woman's eyes. But Sue was talking again now, hurried, as if conscious that she had advertised a sweetness in herself, which made her shy. It seemed that Mrs. Back was an invalid, that she was expecting her soldier son home. No doubt the soldier son liked pictures too. So Huncote went out and in a minute or two came back with an autotype, framed in Australian oak.

"Sorry," he said, "we haven't any more of the girls on the staircase. Give her this one instead." He handed her "Love and Life." "But I expect she'll like it even better just because it's different from yours."

She took the picture, glanced at it, said nothing, and slipped it under her arm. Then for a moment she remained twisting her fingers and shifting her feet. She liked being with Huncote, though he embarrassed her, so she did not want to go; also she wanted to go but didn't know how to.

"Oh, well, I must be going," she said, at length.

But half an hour later a giggling, exceedingly embarrassed, rather blushing Sue returned. She laid the picture on Huncote's desk with its face down and remained silent, her hands upon his desk, most uncomfortable and yet conscious that she was wearing new gloves.

"Well?" said Huncote, "what is it?" He took up the picture and looked at it. "Didn't Mrs. Back like it?" He looked at Sue. There was no mistake now about the colour that had come into the olive cheeks.

"You see," she said, "those girls on the staircase, they'd — well — clothes, you know."

For a moment he did not understand, then he laughed. It appeared that the old lady was very, very shocked.

Miss Groby looked at him as if he were a monster. How could one laugh? She too thought that wasn't a quite nice picture, though she didn't like to say so.

At last Huncote said:

"Well, we must give her something else. What d'you think she'd like?" She wanted to rush out of the room; he made her so self-conscious by asking her opinion; then she mumbled:

"Mrs. Back said she wanted a sweet picture, you know, like 'The Peacemaker', with the two girls, and the young man going away at the back." The dark eyes grew serious. "Ain't it lovely?" she murmured.

Huncote did not know what to say; he had not the heart to tell her that it was not the mission of the Settlement to spread the gospel of Mr. Marcus Stone. Still—she looked so serious. Suddenly she leant over towards him with excitement in her eyes.

"Oh, Mr. Huncote, do give it to her; she's got it into her head, she has, and she says she wants to show it to her Jim. It's a nice picture, don't you think?"

Still Huncote temporised.

"It's a picture with a pretty idea." He hated himself for lying, but what was he to do? Then he tried to soothe his conscience. "You see, Miss Groby," he said, "I hardly know how to put it,—but there are two sorts of pictures, the pictures that give you an emotion, a feeling, you see what I mean, and the other kind which don't matter as pictures but suggest—" He stopped, trying to be lucid. "Pictures which suggest things that happen outside the picture, like a story."

"Every picture tells a story," said Miss Groby dreamily.

Huncote paused. How could he answer this?

"Yes," he said at last, "but don't you see it's not the story of the picture you want but the story of what you feel when you look at it, the drama of your own soul. That's why those pictures of three generations in a gar-

den, for instance, or lovers saying good-by at a stile, aren't good pictures; they take you away from yourself into the lives of the people they show you; they try to make you emotional about the people instead of making you emotional about yourself. That's being sentimental; it's forced, it's artificial, don't you see what I mean?"

Miss Groby looked at him unsmiling, and he thought he saw some response in the soft eyes, an anxiety in the thick mouth, parted and curling sweetly back as the lip of a crimson flower. She had wrinkled her heavy black brows in an effort to understand him, and she looked into his eyes as if she did not see him, but sought something behind them. She sighed; she did not understand, but she thought it all very wonderful. Still a preoccupation was strong upon her; the frown vanished, and she said inconsequently:

"Mrs. Back will be so disappointed if she doesn't get it; you might give it her."

"All right," said Huncote, "I haven't got one, but I'll take her one to-morrow."

"She must have it to-morrow," said Sue urgently, "because her Jim's coming back to-morrow night. You won't forget, will you?"

He laughed; her anxiety was as sweet as it was childish.

"I'll get two while I'm about it, and you can have one too."

Sue's eyes seemed to grow larger and more lucent.

"Oh!" she said, with a little gasp, "it is kind of you, Mr. Huncote; but you won't forget Mrs. Back, will you?"

III

Bert Caldwell walked impatiently up and down the mews. There was a frown on his nice fair face and an angry note in the Soldiers' Chorus which he was

whistling. Bert's taste in tunes expressed him: no music-hall catches for him; not even his whistling could be illiterate, and so to-night it was the Soldiers' Chorus as on others it was the Entry of the Pilgrims into the Warburg, or Divinité du Styx. He shifted, for he always shifted; he was restless and that night impatient because Sue was late. She was to meet him in the mews which ran out of John Street almost opposite his workshop because, the day done, when the dusk fell the mews were so narrow and so dark that he could kiss her unobserved. At last he took from his pocket some notes of remarks he wished to make at the Social Democratic Federation meeting. He wanted to swear, but this, he felt, would show lack of self-control. He was almost absorbed in his notes when Sue came into the mews with the air of somebody who is taking an aimless walk.

"Hallo!" she said airily.

"So there you are," Bert grumbled. "Late again."

"Couldn't help it, Bert, detained by pressing business."

"Oh, you were, were you?" said Bert, sarcastic, though she laid her hand upon his arm. She looked at him for a moment and wished he were not so serious. She did not exactly know what she wanted, but if Bert had been a little more like the young fellows from Bubwith's and said something about having heard of pressing business taking place in the office on the boss's knee it would have been all right. Still, her mission was to please, and at once she pleased. She said nothing, but merely looked at him, parting a little more those curling red lips, looking together reproachful, desirous, and careless. The look availed; without a word he flung both arms round her and, drawing her close, kissed the parted mouth, bending her back as if he hated her, wanted to break her. They remained so clasped for some moments until at last Sue freed herself.

"My word!" she said. "What d'you think you're

up to?" She laughed the soft low laugh of woman hurt and glad. Bert did not reply, but still held her, if more loosely. At that moment his idealism was fastened on Sue who embodied the grace and beauty which would be given to the world when socialism came about and he was dead. She was the scrap of dream given him, an instalment of Paradise. He looked at her very seriously, and if only she had understood better she would have known how she held him, how if told to he would have starved for her and died for her without saying anything about it, or even expecting much. It was enough that she should let him love her.

The moment passed, the tension ceased. With linked arms they passed into John Street, but in Crapp's Lane turned to the right so that they might pass the town hall and lengthen the distance to Paradise Row. For Bert was a respectable young man and no lodger; after his walk with Sue he would go back to his room, have a wash, read his notes over his tea, and then go on to the branch meeting, conscious that no man could meet his arguments and no woman equal the grace of his beloved. They were light just then, and they stopped for a long time outside a picture palace to look at the posters. A great three-reel drama was billed for that week: "Melville of the Swell Mob." Bert criticised the chief picture which represented a raid by American policemen on a gambling house where the men wore evening clothes with double collars, and the ladies high-low-cut frocks.

"Oo," said Sue, "I'd like to see that, Bert."

"Can't take you to-night," said Bert, "got to go to the meeting."

"Well, let's go to-morrow night."

"Don't think I can. I'm likely to be on the job at the fire station. Besides, it may be no good; you can't tell from a picture."

Sue did not reply; her first feeling had been one of

annoyance because her lover did not give her all his time; but his criticism of the picture awoke another echo. What was it she had been told about a picture not telling a story? She was not quite sure, but still she felt it ought not to tell a story, it ought to do something else, she did not know what. But anyhow — not what Bert said. For a long time she stood gazing at the raid on the gambling house, seeking for the drama in her own soul.

“Coom on,” said Bert, shoving her with his shoulder and affecting a north country accent.

It annoyed her vaguely, for she was still thinking in her way of the meaning of art.

“Oo yer pushin’?” she asked tartly.

“You,” said Bert, with resolute wit.

“Well, don’t make so free.”

“Who’s making free?”

“You are.”

“No, I’m not.”

“Yes, you are.”

The conversation straggled away into contradictions which were repeated seven or eight times by each party. But this was only the froth of courtship, and amicably enough she accompanied him into the tobacconist’s. He bought twenty Hadji Mahomets, and she irritated him by asking him for a woodbine. Bert Caldwell earned thirty-five shillings a week; so he bought Hadji Mahomets at two shillings and twopence a hundred. It was rather raspy, this conversation, disjointed. Sue tried to tell her lover about the fine old row with one of the great ladies at Highbury over a torn lace handkerchief, but he interrupted her; lace handkerchiefs always made him angry.

“Lace handkerchiefs!” he snarled; “that’s the sort of thing that goes on while the people starve. Lace handkerchiefs while the working man hasn’t got a shirt! But it won’t go on, I tell you, won’t go on long. You

172 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

wait till we've captured the State machine. We'll make an end of your fine ladies at Highbury."

"But how will mother make a living," asked Sue, "if there aren't no more lace handkerchiefs?"

Bert seized her by the wrist as if to shake her.

"How many times have I told you not to say that?" he shouted. "Don't you understand yet about productive and non-productive employment? I've told you a thousand times. Instead of making jewellery and scent, and all that sort of muck, people will be making steam ploughs."

"Ma couldn't make steam ploughs," said Sue obstinately.

Caldwell lost his temper. Still holding her by the wrist he addressed her at the corner of Crapp's Lane, not at all deterred by two costers with a barrowful of bananas, who encouraged him by ironic cheers.

"Social revolution," Caldwell shouted, "the wages of ability — the House of Lords, blackguards, scoundrels, corruptionists —"

Sue was very angry: making a fool of her in the street! She shook herself free, nursing her bruised wrist. And she thought: "Of course it's his work, he can't help it, but I do wish he hadn't got black nails like that. Why can't he have nails like — like —?"

IV

With "The Peacemaker" wrapped in brown paper, under his arm, Roger Huncote turned into Clare Street. It was the next day and he had not forgotten. But just as he entered Paradise Square where innumerable children were circling, screaming like gulls, about the little pond so full of dirt that no fish could live in it, it suddenly struck him that he had forgotten Mrs. Back's address; or perhaps Sue had not told him. Anyhow,

there he was, not knowing where to go and heavily responsible to Mrs. Back for the treat she was to give her soldier son. He stopped, irresolute. Then he wondered why he was in Paradise Square at all; evidently she must live close by, but where? He remembered that Mrs. Back was one of Mrs. Groby's neighbours as she had come in in the evening; he knew enough of St. Panwich to realise that calls of this sort were paid only within the limits of a street, perhaps of a house. He knew where Mrs. Groby lived, in a tenement house, but he had not the fortitude to knock at every door, asking for Mrs. Back. He had done that once in another case: the door was opened by a young lady in an advanced state of rouge and peroxide, and in a non-advanced state of toilet, who said: "Hallo, darling, how did you find me out?" He had better go to Mrs. Groby, he thought, and ask her.

Mrs. Groby lived in what was more than a house; it was four houses knocked into one and divided up into endless tenements; it was five o'clock, and the building hummed with sounds: crockery being set out for the children's tea, perhaps, or washed; screams, expostulations, spankings. And there was a smell too, the smell of poverty: old clothes, food, pungent washing. He remembered it was on the third floor, for he had so addressed "The Golden Staircase"; as he went up he smiled at his own embarrassment; he had never seen Mrs. Groby, but no doubt she was an amiable person; only Sue might be there too, and in his rôle of Lord Bountiful he would feel awkward. As he passed the second floor he heard from above a cheerful, middle-aged voice, mixed with the swish-swish of what was probably a wet rag drawn along the floor. The voice sang:

"Liza's tootsies, Liza's feet,
You can bet they'll take the cake,
Will Liza's plates of meat."

Mrs. Groby, as she washed the floor, was cheering herself with the long-dead song of some cave of harmony. Huncote knocked. Mrs. Groby was alone and rather confused at being "caught like this", as she put it. While he explained she tried to dry her hands on the wet rag; she was all apology because everything was at sixes and sevens. Unfortunately she could not help him; she seemed to think very hard while Huncote inspected the room,—a kitchen in the corner of which was a small bed. He was used to these living-room kitchens now, and he did not observe very closely the saucepans crowded on the table by the side of a gaping paper-packet of hot chips, for he heard stirrings and voices in the next room: Sue perhaps, and he embarrassed and restless. At last Mrs. Groby said:

"Well, sir, I can't tell yer; Mrs. Back's a friend of Sue's, she is; I can't tell yer."

Huncote asked whether Miss Groby was in.

"No, sir," said Mrs. Groby, "she's at the washhouse round the corner. There's a Highbury lady rather in a hurry for her netted d'oyleys, as she calls 'em." Mrs. Groby looked self-conscious and proud. "You wouldn't think 'ow clever that girl is with lace, sir. It ain't work they can do at them steam laundries."

"No, I suppose not," said Huncote. His difficulty stood, for his conscience was tender, and he could not bear to think that Mrs. Back should not have a picture to show her son. He told Mrs. Groby, who at once grew sympathetic.

The door opened, and two children came in. They were quite undistinguished, brown-haired, blue-eyed children, aged about fourteen. They remained at the door, side by side, staring at Huncote, the boy rather truculent, the girl shy and flirtatious.

"Get along with you," said Mrs. Groby amiably. "Twins," she explained to Huncote.

"Oh, yes," said the young man, embarrassed. He

was told about the twins and how Perce was through the sixth standard at the Clare Street Council school. While Muriel —

“Muriel’s quite the lady,” said Mrs. Groby archly. And she once more bewailed the fact that she had not Mrs. Back’s address. It was Muriel solved the difficulty. Apparently not so shy after all she stepped forward, looking at Huncote like a peasant that worships a blessed medal and yet feels he is the owner of it.

“If I may make a suggestion,” she said, in a very elocuted tone, “Mr. Huncote could ask my sister if he would go round to the washhouse.”

Huncote laughed at the precise mincing child. He was later to understand that Muriel was too refined and democratic to run a message; he was to see connections between her and others of her class, to understand why Mrs. Groby spoke so badly, her elder daughter rather uncertainly, her youngest quite well, too well; to understand the steady rise in the people. But just then he was grateful for the hint. Pursued by Mrs. Groby’s apologies, he went down the stairs. They had all been so flustered and artificial. How awkward! He paused to remember where the washhouse was and, as he thought, above him he heard the resumption in song of Mrs. Groby’s ordinary life:

“Liza’s tootsies, Liza’s feet,
You can bet they’ll take the cake,
Will Liza’s plates of meat.”

The distance was so little, as the washhouse was next door to the schools, that he had no time to collect embarrassment. Nor was he stopped by the old woman who sat in a sort of glass case, knitting; her function was to collect the twopences. She threw him a quick look, decided he must be somebody connected with the Council and at once, all but for the swift movement of her hands, grew as the programme seller at Madame

Tussaud's. For a moment he paused at the entrance. This was a queer, new atmosphere, rather dark. Little by little he saw some twenty bays, in two rows of ten, each one facing a window of frosted glass. He had a sensation of wideness, stone floors; an acrid smell that was pleasant and penetrating, struck him; there was heat and steam too. Half-hesitating, he went along the central alley of ribbed wood under which ran a soft trickle of warm water. There was hardly anybody in the washhouse, for this was Friday afternoon, the laundress's holiday. There were women in only four of the bays, and as he paused he saw broad backs, immense hips; one woman who was vigorous was banging a white lump, making squelches of soap with her other hand and vigorous scrapings with her feet. That laundress was all deafening movement. They were so busy that they did not hear him go past, or the vigorous laundress covered the sound of his footsteps. He passed bay after bay, shy, as if intruding upon some feminine rite; one of the women had taken her blouse off, and he felt guilty. In the last bay but one, next to which a tap was giving off a little steam, he came upon Sue. And it was like discovery, so alone did she seem between the high partitions, isolated by the thin cloud of steam beyond which was the world and the steady bang of the wet linen. He hesitated, then entered the bay.

As he went in Sue turned, and an expression such as he had never seen upon a woman's face came over her features. Surprise and excitement, and a little fear. She stood before him, arms rather apart, staring. Huncote heard himself speak hurriedly, not very coherently, explaining his difficulty about the old woman. There was a silence; then: "Oh," said Sue, rather jerkily, "she lives at number 5, Robert Street, third floor." She too was distrait. "Back's the name," she added. Then she grew silent and he too, as if neither quite knew what the other said and knew that the other

did not know. It was a long silence which, as it grew heavier, grew more meaningful. She was half-shy, but he did not know what she had said, for he was looking at a woman, not listening to a fellow creature's speech. Here was no longer the young girl in the absurd green cloth coat, with the hat upon the back of her head and the many roses. Here nothing artificial, nothing prepared to please or impress him, but the appeal of youth, half-passionate, half-tender. She had tucked up to her knees her skirts and petticoats and tied them with cord; the sleeves of her blue blouse rolled up almost to her shoulders showed long, firm arms, softly moulded, ivory-pale as a tea-rose, and shadowed with soft dark down. For a moment he looked only at the shadows, creamy-dark with a touch of green, that lay in the hollows of the arms. Obscurely, he was conscious of her, rather saw her as part of the scene, of that dull being behind him and the whisper of escaping steam. Then he saw her better, more mysterious and yet evident. Her blouse was open at the neck; the clear olive of her skin was flushed with heat. He saw every detail of her: the broad, mannish shoulders, the body tapering towards the hips, and the hurried rise and fall of the full breasts, young, pointing to the right and left as those of fleeing Diana. There was more pathos than seduction in the young body, because so unspoilt.

He spoke again and knew his words were uncertain, and she replied smiling, a little as if she thought of something else. She held in her hands some lacy stuff which while she spoke she wrung, and went on wringing as if her hands, those strong little dark hands, had impulses of their own, foreign to herself. The gesture fascinated him until he looked into her face and saw with a vision renewed the parted, curling lips and the eyes that were so soft as they rested upon him through the hot, moist air; the curls that were so thick, rather damp and darkened by moisture, tumbled upon her

brow and brilliant here and there with redness where touched them the setting sun as it fell suavely through the frosted glass.

Life was intolerably beautiful then and flimmering, as if she had occurred in a world not made for such things; as if she had escaped from those falsities with which she so well knew how to make herself absurd. He did not know it, but for the first time he was seeing her as she was and at her noblest,—simple, at work, without artifice. He was seeing all that was exquisite in her, her humility, because stripped of gewgaws of which she thought too much; her shyness, because for a moment alone with him; her anxiety to please him, not that he might admire, for in her innocence she thought herself below admiration, but just to please him. He did not know all this, but he could feel it. So they did not say anything, either of them, but as they so stood, drew back into themselves, thrilled and yet afraid of that third creature which sometimes rises between woman and man to bind them, that imponderable, invisible, incorporeal spirit that is made of two, and yet of one and of both, and of another, of illusion passing and yet real; that is so fugitive that none can seize it, so powerful that it may forever bind; so crafty that one thus enmeshed may not escape until he die, so weak that a word or a look can slay it, so sweet that never can sated tongue recoil therefrom, so fierce that all shrink away as they draw closer. . . .

They were silent and helpless as he turned away, and they were glad, though afraid, as they felt the change that had come. Both of them, still unloving and unloved, who had lived all their lives ignorant of their desire, were afraid. They were like saints who have prayed to be taken into the bosom of the Lord through the blessedness of death, and yet shrink away and cry out when they hear from afar the steady beating of the black angel's wing.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

THE DREAM IN THE NIGHT

I

HUNCOTE rose early. He felt slack, heavy, and he had a slight, insistent headache which he attributed to having drunk and smoked too much the night before. Without intention, as if he were running away, he had rung up Ditton and asked him to go to the theatre. It had seemed necessary that Ditton should take him to the theatre; Huncote had been very urgent about it, had swept away Ditton's objection that he was booked by a friend, Captain Verney, and in the end accompanied Ditton and Verney to "The Glad Eye." A dreadful evening, with Ditton being funny and the soldier demonstrating at the play how a man can guffaw like a coster and yet maintain absolute good form. Huncote hated the play; the contrast between the memory of Sue, the soft modesty of her eyes, and the brisk lightness of luxurious amours sickened him. In another mood it would have filled him with contempt to see a man take up flying so as to find time to deceive his wife with a milliner; and he would have sneered when various people in flying kit hid themselves in various parts of the house so as to shield their puny beastliness. He was vigorous that night, so he hated it all. He was tender, not yet the piping Daphnis, but already he saw Chloe,—for washing clothes was not above Chloe's dignity. And he was angry because afterwards he had to have supper at Romano's and, being weak, was dragged for a while into the Fleur de Lis night-club where

through smoke he had to look upon an abominable crowd, fat Jewish men with diamonds on their little fingers and pretty girls with eyes like enamel. Next to him was a party he hated, especially an American girl who never said anything, but replied to a man who looked like a red-nose comedian with "yeps" and "nups" which fell like the bits of metal from an automatic stamping machine; there was a man whom they called "The Honourable John", drunker than Huncote had ever seen anybody, and some fluffies more and more attentive to him as he grew more incapable.

Why had he done it? Because his feelings were confused, because he wanted to do something, anything, to have activity if he could not have purpose, to dull himself, to flee from the picture that was becoming an obsession, which he feared lest it should become an obsession, which perhaps he feared more lest it should become a reality, his life, and which at the very back of his mind he was thrillingly beginning to convert into a reality. That was the night before, when Sue was still so near, and her grace and sweetness all about him. In the early morning it was different; there was no night now to englamour her; she was only a little girl of the people, shy, not virginally, but shy because she had no habit of the world. He felt that he had been absurd, though he had done nothing, said nothing. He had been absurd in emotion if not in action, and to a conscience such as his that was as great an ignominy. He grew hot and angry. As he leapt out of bed he said aloud:

"Mashed! That's what they call it. Completely, vulgarly mashed."

He swore with disgust. He could not sit in his rooms; everything angered him, his landlady's ornaments, notably the black marble clock in the shape of a tomb watched by a shepherdess of bronze, in long skirts and high bodice, date circa 1850; the bath in which he

intimately knew they washed the collie though the landlady denied it. And the breakfast was not ready: he was twenty minutes early himself and flung himself into an unreasonable rage about it. The landlady took this with as much equanimity as if it were she who had been twenty minutes late. She did not care either way. When Huncote realised this there was another burst of anger.

He could not go straight to the Settlement; he had to work off on himself his hatred of the world. So he walked very fast southwards, past King's Cross. He reached Park Crescent and the august solitudes of Portland Place which, at that early hour, was an endless prospect of bent middle-aged female backs. Step-scrubbing, the travail of luxury. As he passed he saw the women's arms, large red arms, some mottled, some dreadfully long and thin, with crimson elbows and starting wrists. They all went with the same rhythm, right to left, left to right, as if they had been swaying and scrubbing since time began, and would so go on to the end of time, with that swish-swish of wet rag.

A new feeling formed in him: he remembered the swish-swish; Mrs. Groby, comfortable and smiling, came up before his eyes. He smiled suddenly, he remembered her song, and as he went, swinging a cane, he murmured to himself:

"Liza's tootsies, Liza's feet . . ."

One of the scrubbers, who was wringing out her rag, said:

"What's the joke?"

He smiled at her. His mood had changed. He grew aware of the sun that fell pale and brilliant as sauterne. In Regent Street an excitement was upon him and grew with the crowd. It was not within himself, but part of the world, and the crowd was a character. He loved it because it was the young crowd of early morning. The hanging thought behind his brain

rose: "Mashed! Completely and vulgarly mashed!" But he was not angry, for slowly there crept over him a feeling he had never known before: "I'm a dog!" Young Huncote, aged twenty-four and yesterday so old, was for the first time in his life young. He tried to tell himself it was a vulgar flirtation, and he did not mind it being vulgar; he liked it; it was exciting, adventurous, just because it was new, just because he had never, like his friends, the Dittons, the Lord Alastairs, painted the town red. He wanted so to paint it at half-past nine. Nothing told his innocence that he was good for little more than pink. So in his ignorance he was happy: the workgirls streamed past him, alone and hurrying, or in couples, chattering as they went, or in noisy groups that struggled over a picture-paper and dawdled before the windows of Peter Robinson. One of the groups impeded him, and he did not try to force his way through; this fluttering femininity, so audacious and so shy, yet so educated by London, stirred and amused him. Surprisingly he was talking to four of them while a fifth, an anxious little person with glasses, tried to draw them away lest they should be late. A big handsome girl, with hair like a fox's fur, picked him as her especial quarry. She casually remarked that her name was "Molly", and did he like cinemas? But they were all in a hurry, and he found that only for a moment had he been a "fellow." Regent Street grew clearer of shop girls; those who were late began to run past him and were being replaced by a new contingent, — the women from the suburbs, about to gaze for hours and buy for minutes, until much later the rich would come to glance disdainfully for a second and pass on untempted.

"I'm a dog!" he repeated to himself. Then he said it again, and it struck him that he did so only because unconvinced. He thought of those girls with whom he had exchanged a few words, of big Molly. How sharp

they had been, all of them, and how unafraid of him! How soon too, he thought, the one who talked most had thought of something she could get out of him.

He turned back through the mercantile Great Portland Street, and as he retraced his steps his mood changed. Doggishness was not working. He was beginning to compare, and the more he thought of Molly and her fellows, the more insistently was he haunted by a darker, a sweeter shade who did not wink, or ogle, or invite. He remembered her speech. Sue had never said: "No fear" or "Not arf", as they did in St. Panwich; at least not to him. It moved him to think that perhaps she was different from the others, still more that perhaps she was so only for him. The nearer he came to St. Panwich, the more did he recede from his old attitude: it was old already after half an hour, so swift are the wings of Eros. No, his was no common little episode. Fearfully he realised that perhaps it was not an episode. A new horror seized him as he saw himself grow more and more deeply involved, unable to rescue himself from her, more dangerous still, from his own impulse. In his despair he threw himself into his work, hating it because it was not adequate, did not so strain his mind as to leave no room for her. All that day, in a rage of work, he did nearly everything that he had planned to do in the week; he made copies of quite unnecessary lists; seeking dullness of mind he would have copied out the post-office directory. But the only result was to make him irritable. Churton came in.

"Hallo!" he said amiably. "You look pretty hard at it." He took up the draft of a lecture: *The Settlement and Its Aims*. "Oh, I was going to do that. Didn't you know?"

"Yes, I did," said Huncote defiantly.

Nothing would have happened if his tone had been different, but Churton was nettled.

"If you knew I was going to do it, why did you do it?"

Before he could think Huncote lost his temper.

"Damnation!" he shouted. "D'you think that nobody here can do anything but you?"

A flush rose on Churton's yellow-greenish cheeks.

"Don't talk to me like that. After all . . ."

"Yes, after all," Huncote snarled, "say it: you're boss here and I'm not; is that what you mean?"

"You know I mean nothing of the kind," said Churton, who had regained self-control, "only I wish . . ."

The conversation turned into an interminable wrangle about minding one's own business and ended in Huncote seizing his hat and leaving the Settlement. A few minutes later, in the street, he tried to remember what the quarrel was about. By the time he reached his rooms he felt abject, and it relieved him only a little to write Churton a long apology. But, the apology written, he could think only of his own condition: what a day this had been! And how he had behaved! Low adventure in Regent Street with not even the excuse of success, silly officiousness ending in his conducting himself like a petulant child! What was coming over him? He sat with his head in his hands in the horsehair arm-chair, gazing at the black marble tomb. "What's the matter with me?" he thought. He did not know; he tried to think and found he could not. It was very hot; the room smelt dusty, of old curtains, mangy carpets; from outside came sleepy air with a rank flavour when it blew from the tannery or the brewery, he was not sure which.

His excitement turned to weariness, and yet he knew he could not sleep, at least not there, in this place that felt like a hutch. He must go out, but he knew that the London streets with their hard pavements glowing in the sunset, the asphalt, soft under his feet, would not help him. He could not be with so many of his fellows,

for they would seem too gay, too confident, and it would be bitter to see them purposeful while he was in turmoil. For a moment he thought of St. Olaves: if his mother had been there alone to smile and talk inconsequently of socialism and the new curate it would have been all right, but he shrank when he thought of Elspeth, whose diamond-cut mind would put his own to shame, and Flora, Flora so charming and yet so abominably like those fluffies of the morning. No, he must be alone. He grew sure of it. The thought of action invigorated him, he jumped up and, without any plan, running out into the street, happened upon a cab sent to him by fate: nothing but fate would send a cab to St. Panwich. It was an old, old hansom with melancholic springs and a horse which during the Boer War had gone for a soldier; it was stuffy, and the contents of the cushion were at last achieving their ambition of years, beginning to burst out. But still it was the car of freedom, and when the man lifted the flap Huncote said: "Paddington" as he might have said "Heaven!" to the mystic driver of the chariot of Elijah.

He had said "Paddington" because for so many years, when in London and returning to Oxford, he had said "Paddington." It seemed quite natural to say "Oxford" at the booking-office, quite natural to catch the 7.30 which he had so often caught before. But he was not asking Oxford to take him to her dry, even-beating heart and talk to him of hexameters; he was asking of her her Isian peace and the darkness that should fall about her spires.

Without intent he shrank from his desire; he stopped but a moment at the chemist's opposite the station to buy a tooth-brush, this material necessity having occurred to him. And then he walked away very quickly, afraid that some don of Gabriel might meet him and force him into reminiscences of degrees, of rags, and tea parties, and binges, Oxford tittle-tattle. He turned

behind the station, crossed the Cherwell like a hiding malefactor, and turned along the high road. He vaguely felt that he must escape from his mind by wearying his body; the ten-mile walk to Shillingford would help him. But he did not get so far; as behind him the thickness of the old town turned into villas and, these scattering, into fields, he came to the silence he was seeking; his pace slackened. He went through Sandford where there were no lights, went on along the road where followed him the scent of sweetbriar. He stopped and turned up a path that ran dark across a meadow, until very near him he could hear the soft lapping of the Thames. He did not want to see the river just then, but to listen to the mild swell of its low summer waters. Its voice made the depth, while the sharp, monotonous cry of the grasshoppers and the faint swish of the grass in the night winds made the lightness. A crescent of pale-green moon hung in a sky almost as pale, where on the leisurely wind floated lazily eternal clouds. He heard only the sounds of nature and, far from man, the passions of man fell from him as an over-heavy coat from weary shoulders. He was not thinking of Sue precisely, or of anything precisely; every pore of his skin answered the cool night in which yet there was warmth; he was like an animal that has been fed and desires no more. An impulse stirred him, and he went farther across the meadow until the path disappeared, and about his feet there clung, like hands, the lush grass near the river side. For a long time he watched the slow, black passing of the waters; he thought of them as symbolic of eternity and did not smile at his own platitude. For this was not a time to cavil at platitudes when the moon melted her pearl in the opal cup of the night.

Then, from far away, came floating towards him the voice of a woman faintly singing. It was lazy and melancholic. He heard the sound of sculls, and the

singing grew louder. In the darkness he saw the blot of a greater darkness upon the water and, watching, his mind so empty that anything could occupy it, he saw it materialise, become a skiff which a man was pulling. By the light of a Chinese lantern in the bows he could see a girl, sitting among cushions, scarlet cushions that in the yellow light of the lantern were as the flesh of an apricot. They could not see him, for they were blinded by their own light, and for a moment Huncote looked upon them, young, loving, alone on earth because they thought themselves alone. Mechanically he observed the rhythm of the man's strokes, the far-thrown look in the girl's eyes as she stared over her lover's head into the night that seemed so black over the lantern. Her voice was thin but tender as she sang:

"Will the ro-ses bloom in Heaven,
Are there an-y gardens there?
An-y vi-o-lets and clover,
Way up with the an-gels fair?

"Will the branches fill with blossoms,
And in win-ter fill with snow?
Will the ro-ses bloom in Heaven?
Tell me, Mamma, ere I go."

He did not trouble to understand or to criticise, to tell himself that these were townees, that the girl was not pretty, that the song was sentimental wash, for as they passed him on their dream-boat, their little world adrift and so full, an intolerable ache formed in his heart; it grew as, the boat drawing away, the singing seemed fainter. They were leaving him, they and their love-filled world, to his loneliness, his undefined desire.

She was still singing, but he could not catch the words so well; every stroke made them fainter, and at last he guessed rather than heard the chorus that came from afar, like an old sweet thought:

“Will the ro-ses bloom in Heaven,
Are there an-y gardens there?
An-y vi-o-lets and . . .”

He could hear no more, the voice had faded away; he stood in the silence upon the bank, the night colder about him and he so lonely.

Much later in the night at Shillingford, where he had gone into the first inn he saw, he woke up. He woke up in possession of all his faculties, as if he had been startled. It was as if somebody had called to him, and he strained his ears to see if — he drew back from his own fantasy. He was afraid a little and yet eager as a virgin pursued. He sat up. It was cold in his room with the night half spent; the window with its white blind was opaline and shadowy as a window's ghost. A treacherous light fell upon the blind as if dawn were near; he heard sounds, cattle lowing far away; a cock crowed, and he shrank as he thought of the day, of the problem that light must bring. “It is easy enough,” he thought, “when it is all unreal.” The cock crowed again, and Huncote feared the day. For some moments he remained like this, sitting up in the tumbled bed, his hands clenched upon the bed-clothes, waiting for the sun; but his eyes straining to the window saw no greater light. Indeed it faded, and the cock crowed no more: false dawn and its chilliness was on him. Suddenly he flung himself down into the bed, drawing the bed-clothes over his head, hoping in the warm darkness to find sleep. But it was thought he found, abominable, clear, logical thought. He struggled, but it was no use; in the hot darkness of the bed the picture of Sue formed before his eyes, fearful and lovely. An obscure instinct in him suggested he should pray to be delivered from temptation, but he was too proud to pray. He thought: “No, I have never worshipped God when all was well; I'll not appeal to Him now.” He would fight the temptation alone and bear the blame if he failed.

A question formed: "The blame? Why the blame?" Sue's dark head grew so actual to him that he was afraid. But more than afraid, he was delighted; the dark eyes seemed full of wonder, and the red, curling lips parted in the smile of appeal, rather than incitement. She was irresistible and charming.

Suddenly he remembered Mrs. Back. He had been so stirred that he forgot her and her soldier son. The picture lay at his rooms in Clare Street. Such was the power of Sin. He was shocked. Then he thought: "After all, why not? What is class? Artificial!" His logic pulled him up. "No, not artificial, but the class that is at the top may not be the upper class; all those who are at the bottom may not be of the lower class." A powerful catch-phrase seized him: "The nobility of labour." And at once Sue's personal charm turned into a sociological charm; she was no longer the one who should be his beloved, but the one who embodied all that was fine in her type. Coarse perhaps, coarse certainly, uneducated, common,—but not vulgar, not cruel, not insensitive like so many of her class—and of his own. For a long time he thought of his own class. He saw it as mercenary often, snobbish generally, idle always. He buried his face in the pillow and soon was flattering his vanity, telling himself that he would do a fine thing, a chivalrous thing, and then he bribed his desire with the matchlessness of Sue. He recreated her in his mind, he understood that to love is to set out on exploration.

The picture of Sue still smiled, glad and resigned, as if saying: "Do with me what you will." He seized the offering; he had a vision of a Sue with all her "h's", of a Sue who knew the difference between "what" and "whom." He smiled as he thought of Sue with only eight roses in her hat, then two or three, then perhaps,—who could tell,—just a black aigrette. Literature. . . . He thought of Sue giving up the penny

novelette and, via Dickens, proceeding to George Meredith. It was Sue, and all Sue, only Sue now, and the fine type forgot; he thought of her, silent and dark, in an evening frock he contrived for her, cream with touches of orange to enhance her dusky beauty: he was discovering woman in his lover. The night was passing and the dawn on the wing; still he thought of her and what he could make of her. God-like he condescended, thought to recreate her in his own image. Only at last, as Aurora laid upon the window a smiling cheek, he called himself a prig and was ashamed.

"No," he said, "it mustn't be like that, it must be she and I, not I and I in female form; it must be just she as she was yesterday, bearing youth like a torch."

He remembered her as she stood before him, her long pale arms, her acquiescent eyes. A humorous idea struck him. "Well, we'll have to have a washhouse too, and she can rehearse the old part." He laughed, and as he so did the dream-head laughed too; it was as if the curling lips said: "Laugh, master, if you like; I don't understand why, but if you laugh I am content."

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

THE WONDERPOOLS

I

"Lost your tongue, have you?" asked Sue.

Bert did not reply. Sue felt displeased with herself. She knew she was handling him in the wrong way, but she could not help it, possibly because some subtle antagonism to Bert had by anticipation crept into her. She managed not to add: "You dummy!" They sat on the tram which this Saturday afternoon was taking them towards Highgate. It was warm, and the scented world was pleasant. Sue did not feel angry really, only huffy; after all she had not done anything. She grew remorseful. As they passed over the Highgate Road bridge, she said: "Feels rather rocky, doesn't it?" Still Bert said nothing, and Sue felt very offended; she was trying hard to please him, and conversation about bridges, which led to railways and other machinery, always pleased him. But as that day it did not, Sue switched from propitiation to proper pride and, when they got off near Highgate Fields, was very much the lady. For a time they walked side by side on the hard, caked turf. Bert said, almost condescendingly: "Pretty hot, isn't it? We need some rain."

"Wouldn't do any harm," said Sue, eagerly clutching at the loverlike speech.

"It'd keep the flies down anyhow," Bert grumbled as he flicked a tormentor from his nose. And for the moment that was all.

They went on side by side, or rather not quite side

by side but Bert a little in front, not much, five or six inches perhaps, in virtue of their class instinct which, better than that of Mayfair, remembers the Indian brave and his squaw. Silently still they went up Parliament Hill; it was a long climb and a hot one. When they got to the top Bert mopped his head, and Sue wondered what he would say, for she knew her quasi-fiancé, knew him for talkative and had always found that a long silence was with him as inevitably the prelude to a row as the lull is that to a storm. And yet her waiting was not all anxious; she found herself strangely absent-minded that day, and she looked out over Highgate Ponds, now corrugated by a slight breeze and glistening dully like molten lead, at the little groups that were families, at the couples pretending that the tree hid them, at the field below, near the band stand, where a great many teams of assorted ages played cricket. She did not think precisely, but something at the back of her mind, unmingled with the grass and the sun, made her happy and unafraid. Yet she was annoyed and rather insulted: the complex product of Saturday afternoon and of parallel passions. Suddenly Bert spoke and it was jarring.

"Been getting yourself talked about, haven't you?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Sue.

"What I say," Bert replied profoundly.

"Wish you'd say it a bit plainer."

"Been getting yourself talked about, haven't you?" said Bert, more cheerfully now, for he knew he was being irritating, and that soothed him.

She made a movement which would have been a shrug of the shoulders if she had been French, and a toss of the head if she had been born in 1820. It did not relieve her much, and she had to be content with assuming an air of mingled aloofness and martyrdom. She knew the power of that air and indeed in a few seconds Bert, having glanced at her sideways, went on:

"Well, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"You didn't ask a question, Bert," said Sue politely.

Bert felt very aggressive. "All right, I'll ask you a question: Is it true that swell, Huncote, is after you? It's all over the place."

"Somebody's been tellin' you the tale, Bert," said Sue. But her heart seemed to have grown in that moment rather too large for her chest.

"I'm not asking you whether somebody's been tellin' me the tale," Bert snarled. "I'm askin' you a plain question. They say he came in to see you the other day. That true?"

Sue was frightened: what were they saying? Perhaps they were saying that he had been there when her mother was not in, and she had the highest regard for her reputation. She hurried to explain.

"It was only about the picture for Mrs. Back. He never had come round before. It was only . . ."

Her humility made Bert as angry as had her defiance. He wanted a quarrel, and he was not going to be done out of it.

"That's a fine story to tell me," he went on bitterly. "'Spose he was looking for Mrs. Back in the wash-house, was he?" She said nothing; she had not felt all that Huncote felt that afternoon. But still it was an agitating memory. "Think nobody saw you?" said Bert.

"Well, they didn't see anything, did they?" Sue replied.

"Oh, oh," said Bert, with an air half of mischief, half of reproach, "so there was something to see, was there? You've given the game away."

"There's no game to give away."

"Yes, there is; you said it."

"No, there isn't."

"Call me a liar?"

"Anything to oblige."

"Thanks, I don't want no favours."

This method of conversation which practice in London streets had brought to perfection might have ruled for a long time, but Sue relapsed into sulky silence while Bert began again.

"I'm surprised at you," he said, "making yourself cheap like that, and with a swell. A swell!" he repeated, with increasing bitterness. "I'm not going to talk about myself or where I come in, you know what I mean . . ." He stopped, afraid from judicial to grow emotional, and to relieve the tension quickly fastened on class hatred. "A swell! A University snob! 'Spose he's turned your head for you. What d'you think you're up to? Going to be a blooming duchess?" He grew angrier. "A man who's never done a stroke of work for his living, one of those who prey upon the people." His wrong grew sociological. "It's to keep his sort that chaps like me got to work day and night, and having them come it over us as a reward. They make me sick."

"You're jealous," said Sue. She had thought that out; she knew, perfidious one, that jealous men hate to be thought jealous.

"Jealous!" Bert repeated scornfully. "Tell me what I've got to be jealous about. I'm a workingman, I am, not a Piccadilly Johnny. You just watch him a bit, and you'll find your masher hanging about the Gaiety stage door, looking for another softy like you. Those people, they live on us like—like hyenas on dead bodies." He paused, feeling that the simile did not express what he meant. "What do we want people like him bossing us for? We know what we've got to do. That sort is just an accident; it's got hold of a little bit of money, and it sits on it because my sort's fool enough to let it keep it, and then it blackmails us to let us have it back. Us!" he shouted, waving an angry fist towards Highgate Ponds. "Who made the

money!" With immense feeling, he added: "It makes me sick."

His anger moved Sue, and she tried to be conciliatory.

"Oh, Bert," she said, "it's always been like that. There have always been masters, haven't there?"

"Yes, but there won't be long."

"You shouldn't talk like that, Bert," Sue protested. "What does it matter if some of us have to serve?" She struggled with a memory of biblical phrases. "Serving in heaven," she said, "I forget the rest."

Bert laughed a short, dry laugh.

"We'll see about serving when we get the bit of heaven. Haven't seen any messing about down our way. P'rhaps I wouldn't mind serving in what you call heaven, but I'm not going to have the angels treat me like a footman. Heaven! Wish you'd give heaven a rest. Heaven's only a parson's dodge."

"Bert," said Sue meaningly, "you know I don't like it when you talk like that."

But Bert had lost his head and his prudence; he faced Sue and, unmoved by the rose which warmth had brought into her cheek's pale dusk, he addressed her like a public meeting.

"Won't people ever understand the mechanism of production? Won't they ever see that this accumulation of capital in a few hands has given the power of blackmail to those who are the least fit? You tell us," he went on, addressing Sue who had told him nothing, "that we're setting class against class. Well, it's time that the lower class, as you like to call it, should be set against the upper class which for so many thousands of years has been — sitting on its head. They talk of class hatred and class war; why, we've had class hatred and class war since the world began; only it was those at the top that were hating those at the bottom and making war on 'em. Times are changing, and time will change more; the world is being born again," he shouted.

"They talk of social reform," he went on bitterly. "Social deform, I call it; making society worse by giving the poor a sleeping draught. Take my word for it," he added earnestly, gripping Sue by the wrist, "the class war will put all that right. The class war,—d'you realise what the class war means? Well, I'll tell you."

"Ouch, you're hurting," said Sue, and wriggled her wrist free.

He did not notice. He went on talking and little by little slid from the general into the particular: didn't she understand that the game that snob was playing with her was part of the tyranny of class? That all his swanky talk he owed to the education he had stolen from the people?

She said nothing; she was angry, and she was bored; he went on arguing and arguing, never realising that here they were alone on Parliament Hill, bathed in the sunshine and in the scent of the warm turf, that all he had to do was for a moment to forget his general ideas, to put both arms round her shoulders and kiss her once or twice, against her will perhaps, until she was entrapped and captured, willingly surrendered.

But Bert was straight and innocent, and this served him as straightness and innocence do serve a man. He went on attacking Huncote.

"Now, then," he said, "out with it, is it me or is it him?"

Sue evaded the question.

"Haven't got to choose, have I?"

"Yes, you have, can't have us both."

"Don't want neither of you."

"What d'you come out with me for if you don't want me?"

"I did want to come out with you," said Sue, suddenly anxious to placate him.

"Oh, thought you didn't want me; call that logic?"

Sue looked at him rather puzzled; never before had she thought of logic, and even then his remark did not impress her much. So Bert shifted and attacked Huncote again.

"Don't congratulate you on your new fancy," he went on. "Narrow-chested, watery-eyed, knock-kneed sort of chap."

"He's not knock-kneed," said Sue, for the first time referring to Huncote directly.

"Yes, he is, and he looks like a parson; parsons always were in your line, Sue."

The girl stamped.

"How dare you talk like that; he hasn't done you any harm."

"Perhaps he hasn't," said Bert, after a pause. "Doesn't look as if I'd got much to lose. You can have him; stick to your pinky-gills; take him along to Madame Tussaud's to the other dummies."

"I'd rather talk to a dummy than talk to you, if you go on like that," said Sue. "Might as well chuck it now, Bert. Looks as if we weren't getting on very well to-day." She made as if to go. "So long!"

Bert detained her; suddenly he grew more intent.

"Tell you what," he said, "if I catch him monkeying round you I'll knock his head off."

"Oh, you will, will you?" said Sue defiantly.

"Yes, and knock yours off too."

For the first time in his life Bert clenched and raised his fist a little. Then he felt ashamed and let it fall. Had he but known it, in that minute she would have been his if he had not let his fist fall, but given her a sore lip and then kissed away her tears. He did nothing, and she, insulted by the threat, yet despising him because he did not carry it out, drew back, was defiant, airy.

"Ta-ta, be good," she said, and turned. Long after her light figure had disappeared beyond the Ponds he

watched her. At first he was all anger, but an intolerable sense of loss seized him. She was gone, and perhaps with her the golden future, the two rooms in the Dwellings, Sunday, the clean collar, Sue listening to his political speeches with his sons, Carl Marx Caldwell, Holyoake Caldwell, and their little sister, Marie Bashkirtsev Caldwell. Everything was sliding; Sue gone, the world was chaos. He thought: "It's enough to make one an anarchist." Miserably he resolved to read up some Kropotkin.

II

She went down the slope with her head up. She knew that she was holding it up, so she held it a little higher. She looked proud and fine, with her full mouth compressed and mutinous, her heavy eyebrows that tried to meet in a frown. At the bottom she paused, for here was the railway and somehow, perhaps because it was so hot, so fine and Saturday, she did not want to go home. She turned back and slowly walked towards Hampstead, escorted by thoughts which troubled her because she understood them so ill. This was not wonderful, for those thoughts made a strange company. She formulated one of them. "Given me the chuck," she murmured. "More or less."

She squared her broad shoulders and thought: "Who cares?" But at once Sue knew that she did care. She had lost Bert; well, more or less. One never did appreciate people until they were gone. "Not lost but gone before," she thought, with bewildering irrelevancy and immense satisfaction. Then returned to her preoccupation. Yes, she had sort of lost Bert, but once more, as she thought, "Who cares?" the image of Bert became more insistent; one could overlook a human being but not the ghost of a glamor-

ous past. She remembered things, little things, the day when, between an exposition of the errors of the anarchist, Kropotkin, and an eruptive allusion to the record speed of steam boats, he had confessed his love for her.

"Funny," thought Sue, "I remember where he said that; behind the gasometer, it was, up Crapp's Lane." She sighed. It had not been a bit like the picture postcards with lovers at a stile. Still, it had been good. She sighed again and looked sentimentally at the ring which was not exactly an engagement ring and which, therefore, she wore on her second finger. Garnet and opal: they always say that opals are unlucky. She sighed; fate was cruel.

Her meditations were interrupted, for she became aware of a presence. She had passed a young man who looked at her. That did not matter; they often did. She heard his footfall behind her, and still she thought; he must have passed her, for she had been conscious of a peering into her face. The young man walked more slowly now, and she rather liked the look of him, his straw hat with the red and purple ribbon, and his brilliant orange boots. But the young man walked more slowly so that Sue might catch him up. Bruised heart or not, Sue had her principles; just as he was about to speak to her and raised his hand to the impressive hat, she turned at right angles and away, leaving him conscious that this was no go.

He might have pursued her; he would hardly have been noticed. She had other preoccupations that afternoon. The emotional moment was past, and she slowly scrambled up the slopes of the Vale of Health towards the Spaniards Road that held an endless procession of boys and girls, and motorcars that hooted towards the north; her sentimentality was giving way to anger. "The chuck! Actually had the sauce to give her the chuck!" It seemed incredible. (He had

not given her the "chuck", but Sue chose to be injured and to think so.) As she walked on moodily she realised that it was not Bert's place to give her the chuck; if she chose to do so that was quite another thing. And what was the row about after all? She stopped for a moment to look into the pale sky that hangs over West Heath, so deep that one is sure the sea lies behind those hollows, and mutely asked the sky what she had done. "Mr. Huncote," she thought, "well, what about him?" Then more aggressively: "Well, *what* about him?" She had done nothing, it was not her fault. Her indignation melted into interest. Bert had no business to speak about him like that. Wasn't stuck on him, of course, still . . . She ceased to think of Bert and Huncote; began to think of Huncote. Rather dreamily she evoked the young man: she liked the picture, the tallness, the slenderness, the serious eyes, the air of hesitation and delicacy. It was all different from, from — well, from other men. For some time Sue struggled to find a word; the word was "breeding", but she could not find it and so, as a substitute, little by little she formed a companion picture, that of the hero of a novelette, called Sir Lucius. Sir Lucius proved an indirect way of getting at Huncote. She remembered Sir Lucius and how he took his cousin's guilt when the latter stole the will which should have made Sir Lucius heir to the estate. She wasted a tear on the heroine, kept by force in a moated grange for seven years, who came out, fortunately more beautiful than ever, to marry Sir Lucius. Her eyes grew misty: Sir Lucius, wet and starving on Dartmoor . . .

Yes, he was like Sir Lucius, daring-like. Pity his name was not Sir Lucius. She wondered for some time what his name was as she only knew him as "R." Richard, of course, or Robert. For a moment she dwelt on a vague vision of somebody whom she could

call "Bob" or "Dick." Then she scolded herself without being quite clear about it, and summed up the impossibility of the whole thing: "He's a toff!"

A little later, as she tried to assuage her woe with threepenn'orth of picture palace in Heath Street, she was still reflecting on the queer complex who was now becoming more or less "Sir R." But a bitterness ran through the vision. "He's a toff," she thought again. She sighed and meditatively sucked a peppermint.

III

It was late in the evening. Mr. Groby was still at the St. Panwich Arms, waiting for the Sabbath. Sue puzzled her mother that evening, for on Saturday nights it was her habit to go out either with Bert or with Ada Nuttall. She stayed at home, "quiet as a mouse," Mrs. Groby thought. There was a lengthy search among the novelettes of which several scores littered corners in Sue's bedroom. Then Mrs. Groby went to sleep in the armchair in her favourite attitude, hands crossed on her belt. When she woke up, blinking, she saw only the profile of her daughter, nearly black as she bent under the gas.

"Wot yer readin'?" asked Mrs. Groby dreamily.

Sue did not reply.

"Why aren't yer go out ternight?"

"Don't always want to be out," said Sue, rather acidly.

Mrs. Groby got up and, as she passed, looked enquiringly at the novelette; the title *Sir Lucius and His Love*, told her nothing. "Well, well," she said comfortably, "I used ter be like you, Sue. I used to be a great reader, I did." Sue shut up the novelette. Then, as if with intention, Mrs. Groby said: "Seen Mr. 'Uncote agin?"

"No," said Sue.

"Oh," said Mrs. Groby. Then again: "Oh!"

"Oh, what?" asked Sue, suddenly savage.

"Didn't say nothing, merely thought."

Sue stood up. She was feeling very angry, and especially because she did not know why.

"Thort yer'd 'ave seen 'im agin," said Mrs. Groby thoughtfully, and then more cautious, "Yer go ter the Settlement so much. One runs across people. It's a small world." She sighed: that sort of phrase always relieved Mrs. Groby.

Mrs. Groby went on talking about Roger Huncote. She described him in detail, pronounced him "a 'an'some feller", and grew reminiscent of an ostler at the "Chequers", down in Sussex, "before you was thort of, my girl." She tried to encourage her mother to tell her the idyll but, as if impelled by an instinct, Mrs. Groby continually returned to Huncote. She wondered how much he got paid at the Settlement. Sue had to keep herself down so as not to cry out that it was voluntary service. Mrs. Groby began to speculate as to how he got religion, which left Sue dumb, for religion was not discussed in her world. Then Mrs. Groby began again: "Shouldn't mind 'avin' another look at 'im. Now, Sue, when yer see 'im agin — Well, I never!" Mrs. Groby stopped, both hands well away from her hips, for Sue jumped up, seized the candle and, with as much dignity as speed allowed, went into the inner room. Almost immediately Mrs. Groby heard the sound of boots being thrown on the floor with unnecessary violence. Mrs. Groby felt indignant: leaving her like that and making all that noise. She opened the door a little and whispered: "Stop that row; I'm s'prised at yer."

Sue did not reply. Quickly undressing she got into bed where Muriel was fast asleep.

Muriel had had a good Saturday. Her hair plaited, she had washed with care, washing being a new taste.

On leaving the tenement she sat down on the stairs to slip on a more than second-hand pair of grey spats which she had secretly bought for fourpence. Outside, her particular Romeo, aged fifteen, was serenading the house to the tune of "We All Go the Same Way Home." Romeo had drawn his wages that day, eight bob, and paid nothing at home because his mother was a widow and he a terror. So they had been to a picture palace; a great many oranges, at four a penny, had been eaten in the High Street and on monkey parade much peel had been flung at rival couples. She rushed out after tea too, and Romeo, whom apparently nothing could repress, took her into the gallery of the St. Panwich Empire. It had been lovely, she thought, and Romeo, with thirty others, had whistled violently and challenged the commissionaires to come and chuck 'em all out. And he tried to kiss her on the way back. "Behave yourself," thought Muriel, proud and yet a little stirred. She was awake, conscious of digestive disturbance, oranges probably. She moved, tried to find a comfortable position, and as she so did came up against her sister's firm body. She was preparing to shove Sue who really took up too much space in bed, then noticed a quiver in the shoulder against which she lay. Muriel became more wakeful; she listened. She heard a regular wheezing that thrilled and frightened her. A sharp little vowel sound, regularly repeated, it came, and Muriel was frightened, for the big, warm shoulder against her trembled. "Sue," she whispered. Her sister did not reply. Half-hesitating Muriel took her by the arm, tried to turn her towards her. For a moment Sue resisted, then gave way. "What is it, Sue?" Muriel whispered. "What are you crying for?" Sue did not reply but, embracing the whole of her sister's narrow little shoulders within one long arm, she kissed her. Muriel clung to the elder girl, not at all mincing now, but afraid and very

fond, and somehow very sorry. "What are you crying for?" she asked again, and again, but Sue would not reply until at last the little girl got up and lit the candle. But she drew back, surprised, for though Sue's face was wet with tears, she smiled. It was like an April sun-ray through a shower and yet more strange: such a smile as Muriel had never seen before on Sue's face.

They went to sleep, both of them, much later. Sue was very happy. She knew she could not marry him, such a swell. And though not at all ignorant she was far too innocent to think of anything else. Shyly in the dark, as her eyelids sank down, she whispered to herself what she would not have told any one, even if tortured: "I'm gone on him!" She basked for a little while in the thought, then added: "And very nice too!"

She was annoyed in the morning. She had embraced somebody in a dream, but whether it was Sir Lucius or whether it was R. she did not know, and it had been a confused dream; it seemed to have been mainly about eggs. What had eggs to do with it? This troubled her so much that she went out specially to the sweet-shop in Northbourne Road and bought "The Key to Dreams" for a penny. It was not very clear: scarlet fever perhaps, or a letter from Australia. She disregarded the omen for already she was happy enough to think that she could master Fate.

IV

In those times Huncote wished he were more of a worldling. He lived, he felt, too much in the Settlement and for it. Analysing the last eight or nine months, it seemed that he had given it nearly all his time during the day; in the evening he had often been wanted for a concert, a meeting; when not wanted he

had loafed away his time with Churton, or at Ford's boxing class, or even in the Progress Arms. The chief breaks had been a few week-ends at St. Olaves, and for a while in June Flora had been exacting, had compelled his attendance at theatres; he had been asked out to dinner a little too, but all that was the surface. He had given the Settlement the whole of his neophyte ardour. And now he was not thinking of the Settlement, but of an incident in Settlement work. He tried to be reasonable, to minimise the incident while there was time. Very seriously, on a hot night, he sat in Finsbury Park under a chestnut tree, still heavy with pink castles. He was formulating his intentions. He formulated them for a very long time, head down, making a pendulum of his walking stick, looking so far away that two girls who went by felt sorry for him and talked loud to indicate ready sympathy. But he had quite enough bother with girls as it was, and the upshot of his vague reflections was that he was not going to do anything rash. Oh, no, not going to make himself ridiculous with a silly intrigue. He was going to be very distant and see what happened. He was going to investigate and see what she was really like. Hang it all! he had seen life, he was not going to be carried away by a pretty face. Then in the moonlight upon the light earth at his feet, with the point of his walking-stick, as if a power held his hand, he tried to sketch a woman's profile.

V

Sue felt the confidential impulse. If she had been a Roman Catholic she would have rushed into the confessional with a tiny little sin and come out comfortable with a great big absolution. Only she was a member of the Church of England, so seldom went to church, and was not likely ever to think of the Al-

mighty unless she was in great trouble, or wanted something very badly. Her true God, though she did not know his name, was St. Anthony and, though she never thought of him, she trusted him and would have asked him to restore anything she had lost, whether purse or reputation. It did not occur to her to commune with him in this emergency, for it was too delightful; hers was the English God, for the days of pain, not for those of joy. For the days of joy she naturally turned to the world, dazzlingly embodied in her friend, Ada Nuttall. For Ada was the world, and Sue secretly half-hoped that she was the flesh and the devil too, for she was a manicurist. There was something meretricious and rather fast about manicuring, Sue felt. Holding men's hands and all that. Ada Nuttall was a plump, fair young person of twenty-three, whose figure waged a continual and sometimes almost successful contest with her stays. They were not very good stays, and if Sue had not been so innocent this would have reassured her as to Ada's virtue. She was always hopeful about Ada's virtue, thought she did not mean half she said; and still Sue hoped that she did mean that half, because this made of Ada a dashing, mysterious, dangerous creature who fired her younger friend's more childish imagination, made her a frightful rip.

She saw her from the refuge at Piccadilly Circus Tube Station where they had appointed to meet. Ada was looking very smart in that linen coat and skirt, Sue thought. And that sweet little hat, right over the eyes. They were nice blue eyes in the fresh face; the rather puggy nose and little pink mouth looked impertinent.

"Hello!" said Ada.

"Hello!" said Sue. Ada was a hello girl and admiring Sue copied.

They walked up Regent Street, Ada chattering steadily of the day's events in the manicure parlour,

which was just off Regent Street. Sue tried to listen for a while and to say the right thing, such as "An' what did he say to that?" or "Well, I never," but the shop windows fascinated her. Ada, who was blasé, swept her past Swan and Edgar's.

"And you wouldn't believe it, as soon as he got in, he took me on his knee and started cuddling me."

"What did you do?" asked Sue. "Smack his face?"

Ada giggled. "Wouldn't be much of a success if I did that. Sat on my dignity."

"And on his knee?" asked Sue, suddenly brilliant.

Ada laughed. "Well, not long, what d'yer take me for?"

Sue managed to anchor the worldling outside the Samaritaine, and for a moment all was well; they decided that these models were not their style. The conversation passed from gallantry to dress.

"I always say," Ada repeated, "whatever you do, wear something that's becoming. Never mind the fashions."

"Yes," said Sue, much impressed, "that's true. Only how's one to know?"

The learned Ada unveiled mysteries: how, if one was stout and wore vertical stripes, one looked slim; how a small waist should be emphasised (for she believed in waists) by a white belt; how to judge a colour by laying it against your cheek; how to reduce large features by broadening hat brims. It was very wonderful, Sue thought. All the way up Regent Street Sue gave the cues. She forced Ada to stand awhile and stare at the beautiful lady in wax who tip-toes on one foot to show how one can wear orange silk stays and lingerie like the tip of a wave, and yet behave like an acrobat.

Ada went on to bewail her difficulty in fitting herself with blouses.

"I'm an out-size," she moaned. She drew herself up. "Still, it's not everybody dislikes that." She murmured confidences.

Sue blushed. "No, not really!" she said in a thrilled tone.

Ada nodded, her blue eyes sparkling. "And not circle, neither; stalls, that's the sort of fellow he is."

As soon as they crossed Oxford Street and turned to quieter regions the frightful rippishness of Ada began to degenerate. The fellow who had offered Ada stalls led to reminiscences of other fellows, and naturally to Bert. Ada was interested in Bert, for under her doggy exterior was a fraudulently simple person. She liked to talk like a familiar of every night-club, or let us say of their vestibules, but Sue knew very well that behind the pseudo-rake was a girl most of whose earnings went to support her father, a more or less paralysed gasfitter, and a gloomy grey mother who "let" when she could.

"Those fellows," Ada summed up, "they're all right for a lark, but they aren't safe." For a moment both thought of the less seductive but more reliable men of their class, and Ada said: "You take it from me; gentlemen don't do any good to girls like you an' me." She grew sensible. "They take us out and give us a good time, but they don't marry us, not they! Not that I'd marry one if he wanted me to," she went on reflectively. "They're always getting divorces, that sort."

There was a silence during which the two girls reflected upon high life as stated by the picture papers. It was terrible and attractive, the sinful, gilded existence. But Ada's words had opened a vein in Sue's mind; at last she spoke:

"Do you know Mr. Huncote?"

Ada thought for a little; she had been to a Settlement

dance or two. "Can't say I do," she said, at last; "what's he like? Where did you pick him up?"

"I didn't pick him up," said Sue indignantly. "You saw him at the dance the other day; very tall he is, and he's got grey eyes and fair hair, oh, such thick fair hair."

"Sue!" said Ada meaningly.

But Sue did not notice the inflection. "You should see his hands," she went on sentimentally. "They're like — like — well, like what a baby's would be if they were big."

"'Hem," said Ada, "been holding 'em?" Sue went crimson. "I see," said Ada. "I remember the fellow now, seems to me; you danced a lot with him that night, didn't you? Well, I wish you luck. Don't you forget what I told you about gentlemen. Don't make yourself cheap."

"I'm not going to," said Sue indignantly; "besides, there's nothing in it."

"Oh, no," said Ada, "of course not. Anybody could look at you and see there's nothing in it. Since there's nothing in it tell me all about it."

Sue grew sulky and offended; she had to have her arm squeezed, to be told not to swank, before at last she confided what had happened since the dance. She told it all very hurriedly.

"Came round to the washhouse, did he?" said Ada. She grew judicial. "Still, he *might* have wanted the address."

Sue defended Huncote, inferentially attacked. She felt guilty, for even Ada could not be told all; a sentiment, half-modest, half-sacred, prevented her from telling how she had been lost and found on the banks of the sleepy hollow, by the cropped gigantic trees. It was enough that she should establish a link of some kind between her and Huncote.

"If Bert hadn't gone on so," she said.

That seemed to excuse and stimulate her. Little by little Ada accepted the interesting situation, and Sue began to develop her attitude: she was going to be reserved, in fact haughty, like Sir Lucius's young lady. She made Ada define "haughty", and their definitions agreed, which was comforting.

"See what I mean?" she said, "I'm not going to let on. *She* didn't let on." ("She" was Sir Lucius's young lady.)

"What'll you do?" asked Ada.

"Oo, I dunno. Say he'll want to do something for me and I'll say, 'Pray don't trouble.' Or what was it *She* said?" Sue thought for a moment. "Yes, what she always says is, 'I am totally indifferent thereto.'"

"Thereto, that's a good word," said Ada.

Sue grew half-sentimental, half-stately. "Wish I'd a train," she said, "just to practise sweeping in and out, you know, in and out of rooms. *She* was always doing that."

There was a pause. Ada grew serious.

"You're quite sure it's all right?" she said. "I know something about that game."

"Oh, there's no harm in it," said Sue. "It's not as if I was gone on him."

"Hope you aren't," said Ada, "but I don't know; what about Bert?"

"Oh, well," said Sue, shyly and yet proudly, for she was, it seemed, in the position most desired of women: to have to choose between two men, "it might be a bit awkward, of course, but . . ." She stopped to think that she was really very fond of Bert, but reminding herself of her own dignity, went on: "I'm not going to take any more sorce from Bert, and the sooner he knows it the better. Of course . . ." Sue outlined another dream where an exceedingly crestfallen Bert would be magnanimously taken back and married. Meanwhile there would be a very exhilarating flirtation

with the swell. She was not vulgar, but she was nineteen, and it was all such fun.

The conversation, as they passed Euston, slowly ebbed away from the centre of their interests. The rippishness of Ada was entirely gone, and now they were once more young St. Panwich girls. Near King's Cross they cheeked the policeman; they felt frightfully happy with the day gone, and they nearly let two young clerks talk to them because two girls may talk to two men while one girl may not talk to one man. And quite near Paradise Row they indulged in a long gaze at a picture postcard shop and nearly became acrimonious, because Ada preferred Lily Elsie to Gertie Millar.

They parted just in time to get home for tea.

"Been with Ada, 'ave yer?" asked Mrs. Groby suspiciously, then said no more. She was disturbed, for she had met Bert a few minutes before as she ran out to buy a pennyworth of tea, it being Friday. Bert had been very sulky, almost rude, and gave her a message she did not understand, presumably because he was with another man and could not speak out: "You tell Sue I'll knock both their heads off!" Mrs. Groby decided not to deliver the mysterious message, but she did not like it.

VI

They came together with the guilelessness of young people who have for hours been watching each other's movements and then meet, as they like to put it, unexpectedly: assisted coincidence. It happened in one of the corridors of the Settlement a little after six. Huncote was coming out of his office, and for unaccountable reasons hanging about his own doorway, while Sue paced the corridor with a slow regularity revealing that she had walked up and down it several times in the last few minutes. They were very much upon their guard, so much so that the two who met were stage figures, not

a woman and a man. Huncote had one hand in his pocket and pretended to whistle, while Sue held her head in the air and pretended not to know that she was wearing her best Sunday sham pearls. She was just about to say: "Fancy meeting *you!*" when just in time she remembered the haughty attitude of Sir Lucius's young lady and said in a shrill falsetto: "Gracious! How you startled me, Mr. Huncote!" But at once she knew that she was blushing vivid. And Roger Huncote blushed too, for he had seen, as the haughty head of Sir Lucius's young lady revealed the drooping crimson brow of Susan Groby, something that he had never seen before in any woman's eyes, yet something which he recognised as if he had been waiting for it. It was the love-look, humid and brilliant, shy and gay, a look that made him think that on a windless night the tide was rising on a sandy beach, the moon shining for a moment through the thin pale waters of a flat wave. And then it was gone as a fitful gleam passing.

They laughed, and the laughter was uncertain, for it was false; it was the laughter of uneasiness, hiding the desire to exult. "My God!" thought Huncote. "How beautiful you are!" And she, less articulate even to herself, felt that she was happy as if the air had grown warm and sweet-scented.

"Come to do some work?" asked Huncote at last, attempting cheerfulness, surprised because his throat was dry.

"Yes," said Sue, "that is, No, only just looked in for a minute." She struggled to find a motive, then said vaguely: "Left something here the other night; came round to fetch it."

"Yes," said Huncote, assuming vast interest, "have you found it?"

"No," said Sue, still struggling, "I'll have to have another look round."

Then both together felt that by not mentioning the object of the search they were entangling themselves in the loss of something so personal that the situation was becoming awkward. They were still blushing, looking at each other furtively; they were like two people wrecked as small children from separate ships at opposite ends of a desert island who come upon each other in their maturity, man and woman, afraid, delighted, curious, each casting interested but covert glances upon a strange, attractive animal.

"I'll have to be going," said Sue.

"Are you in a hurry?" said Huncote. He did not want to know that, only he felt he must prolong this minute. He had come to the moment which Faust so desired, could say to the fleeting minute: "Tarry yet a while, thou art so beautiful."

"I must be getting home," said Sue vaguely, but still she did not go. She stood in front of him, her brown fingers entwining nervously. Then Huncote, because he was the shyer of the two, plunged.

"Oh, well," he said jauntily, "I'm going too."

Miracle! Together they went along the corridor and out of the building, Huncote leading and she submissive. They made no plans. There was no understanding, but as they came out of the Settlement they did not turn to the left and across towards Paradise Square; slowly and silently they turned to the right by the High Street. At a corner Huncote said:

"One can't hear oneself talk here."

"No," said Sue, though she knew very well that neither had said a word, "it's the trams."

They turned up a side street and through other little streets, straight northwards, as if they had agreed that they did not want to be seen together in the High Street. After a few moments Huncote grew self-conscious; assuming she did not know where he lived, he said:

"I hope you don't mind my taking you out of your way?"

"Oh, don't mensh," said Sue.

They went on silently through the little streets where hundreds of children played hopscotch, and here and there some large woman with red arms talked to another of her kind, or exchanged chaff with a canvasser who was trying to sell her a photograph enlargement.

They went across Northbourne Road, Sue a little frightened because Bert followed this way homewards from the workshop. Perhaps because frightened she was thrilled. And Huncote grew troubled; he did not know where he was going to or leading her, but only knew that so long as he chose to lead her she would follow, and that he was glad to lead. He was tired of struggling with his desire. He felt that he wanted something better than to walk with her through the slums; he wanted water and a tree, something to raise the spirit of the sleepy hollow. And as fortune favours lovers they came suddenly upon St. Panwich churchyard.

"Shall we go in?" asked Huncote, observing the board: "Open 7 A.M. to 7 P.M." Then, as if he feared opposition: "It'll be quieter in there."

Sue did not reply, but she followed, and for a long time very slowly they walked among the tombs. She was interested, and soon she was hurrying from one stone to another, marking the age at which others had died. They found the tomb of an old lady, aged ninety-two. "She didn't have nothing to complain of," said Sue. They found others, but merely seventies and seventy-fours. "The old lady has it," said Sue, noting the record.

Huncote was amused: she was so young that death seemed remote and meant nothing to her; it was like Australia to one who has never left his village. They came upon a tomb with a tall white column upon which

was simply written: "Susannah Brown, aged 19." They did not say anything, but remained quite close to each other, their shoulders almost touching. "Seems a pity like," Sue murmured. "Just my age," she sighed. Then, being her mother's daughter, she added: "Such is life!" She did not offend the man's finer taste for, with her dark eyes downcast and a droop in her full red mouth, she was a picture of sweet melancholy, of young life weeping over young life gone to dust.

"Susannah," he said, "that's your name too, I think."

"No," said Sue, "my name's Susan." She threw him a sidelong glance to see if this displeased him. "Wish it wasn't," she added.

"What?" cried Huncote. "You don't like it? But it's a jolly name, a real country name."

"Yes," said Sue grudgingly, "it was all along of grandma. She came from Sussex, and she would have it. Mother ought to've known better," she added peevishly. "Only she was afraid the savings would be left away from us; not that we got them after all, for grandma was took with religion and left them to the blacks in Africa."

Huncote laughed at the little tragedy. "You may laugh," said Sue, rather resentful, "but if it hadn't been for that I'd been called Vera. Now that's a name. Muriel's all right; she was born after grandma died." She grew resigned. "Still, what's in a name?"

Huncote said nothing and for a moment wondered whether he would have liked it better if instead of "what's in a name?" she had said, as he remembered a schoolmistress once said to him, rather arch and conscious of originality: "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

Little by little, as they walked around and around the cemetery, conscious now of themselves and but little

of watchful, patient death, Huncote talked more freely.

"I thought you mightn't like to come here," he said. "You might have thought it depressing; you oughtn't to, you know. Death, you see, is so necessary to life; it takes away those things and those people who have played their part, and it makes room for the new. Death is no enemy, it has no sting; it is nothing more than Heaven's gardener who roots out the old plants and makes room for to-morrow's flowers; don't you think so?"

"Yes," said Sue.

"It was a beautiful idea," Huncote went on, "to build the cemeteries round the churches, churches where one was christened and married. Then indeed you had a Holy Trinity of birth, love, and death, the three eternal things which make one another complete and which without one another cannot exist."

They stopped for a moment before a fresh grave, that of a child; the rough edges of the clay gleamed red and were banked high with a nest of white roses and lilies. Somehow this changed Huncote's mood, for the roses were thick and dewy, still violently alive as if, consolors of the dead, they rioted in life's festival. With swifter beating pulses he led her out of the cemetery. They went again silently into the streets and silently too for a while stood upon the canal bridge, looking out towards the many railway lines at Chalk Farm, which glittered red in the setting sun. Just beyond a smokestack was crowned with a great black cloud of smoke like a djinn escaping from a bottle. Black the smoke, bloody the sky, and sharp-cut, as if painted in purple ink, the roofs close-clustered in the sinking sun.

"Isn't it wonderful?" he said.

"Isn't it?" said Sue.

She did not mean what he meant; she was thinking how very tall that smokestack was and how wonderful

that anything should be so big. But he thought that she saw what he did; he discerned a sense of beauty where there was only a sense of magnitude. It fevered him, this idea that she was so much, and could become so much more, even such as himself. He began to talk again, half to himself, of beauty now and of the corners where it lurked, of the strange fact that it was nowhere and everywhere save where you chose to place it; that beauty was in yourself, in your eyes, and that maybe, if you were so made, all things might become beautiful.

She listened patiently, not understanding, yet delighted; she listened to his voice rather than to his words, and she looked at his hands,—gentleman's hands. But at last she had to speak, and now she was no longer Sir Lucius's young lady. Impetuously she said:

"Oo, you *are* clever!"

He laughed, he was flattered; he hated himself for being flattered, and yet went on being flattered.

"Nonsense," he said, with affected modesty.

"Oh, yes, you are," said Sue, urgent champion. "You could do anything, you could. Why, there's a lady that does Answers to Correspondents in 'Home Chat'—well—"

He shrank; it was a little awkward to have conveyed to him that he might, well, perhaps might be the equal of such a one. Still he was pleased: for the first time she had praised him directly, linked herself with him by personal opinion. Bond of thread or bond of silk, what did it matter after all just then, if only bond there was?

At the end he said, surprised to find his voice uncertain: "I say, we might—we might come out again—if we happen—"

"I might run across you," said Sue airily.

VII

Huncote found it very difficult to talk to his mother that week-end. Flora got into his way by begging him gently to persuade Mrs. Huncote not to go to Harrogate but to take her to Dieppe or some other naughty place. And Elspeth was a nuisance too because she had just joined the Antis and was conducting a vigorous campaign of conversion against her mother; as Mrs. Huncote took in *The Common Cause* (but not *The Suffragette*), and had vaguely approved of militancy until the previous week when the house of some friends of hers was burnt down, she was much troubled.

But at last on Sunday night, when they were alone in the garden, he managed to talk. They at last disposed of suffrage and of another complicated doubt of Mrs. Huncote's, namely, whether she should sympathise with the farmers whose henroosts were being raided by foxes, or with the local hunt to which after all her husband had belonged. Huncote was also told every detail of Trunch's final misfortune, which was to be sued for affiliation.

"I say," he remarked, quite casually, "there's rather a funny thing happening to a friend of mine; you don't know him, I s'pose; his name's — Corry," he improvised. "He was at Gabriel with me; plenty of money and all that, and I hear he wants to — to marry — well, a girl of the people."

"What sort of girl?" asked Mrs. Huncote.

"Oh, she's lovely," he said hurriedly, "she's very, very pretty, and she's an awfully sweet girl." He paused, he felt awkward, he was giving himself away.

"What does she do?" said Mrs. Huncote obstinately.

"She — oh, she's in a factory. But she's awfully refined and all that. At least Corry says so," he added.

Mrs. Huncote said nothing for a while. She stared at the flower-bed where in the brilliant summer night

the fat yellow begonias spread like hands. She played with the fluffy cockade of a hollyhock and said:

"Poor boy! Can't anybody stop it?"

"I don't think so," said Huncote, glad that it was night and that she could not see his face too well. Then he plunged. "But, after all, why should one stop it?"

"My dear Roger!" said Mrs. Huncote, half-scandalised. "How can you talk like that? I really thought you were grown up. You tell me Mr. Corry is one of us, and you actually think — but it's ridiculous!" She grew testy. "They'll jar upon each other, and they'll bore each other. And of course her people are impossible. What are her people?"

"I don't know," said the wily Roger; "the usual sort, I expect."

"Exactly. The usual, decent, respectable sort; perhaps the mother's been a servant, and I s'pose the father gets drunk now and then. It's social suicide to begin with; probably the girl can't talk properly, and when it comes to entertaining — why, it's absurd! You wait until Mr. Corry sees the clothes she wears."

Huncote murmured something about love.

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Huncote, more softly. "That's very wonderful, and I'm not at all surprised; when one's in love one doesn't care about class or about anything except love; only, you see, there's not only love in the world; one has to think of all sorts of other things."

"I thought you were a socialist, Mother," said her son, suddenly aggressive.

"That's saying too much, Roger. I'm quite in sympathy, you know that. And one day I'm sure that everybody will be educated, and that everybody can mix together, but just now it can't be done. I hope I'm nice to the servants, but I don't want you to marry one of them."

He laughed, but nervously: to be himself involved even as an instance was frightening. No, he would get no help here, he thought. He was wrong; he was being given the most powerful help that can be given youth: opposition.

VIII

It was in a picture palace rather late one afternoon, when Sue was free because the great lady of Highbury's blouse was so extra special that Mrs. Groby had to wash it herself, that Huncote remembered Theresa. He had not seen much of her in the last few weeks. The heat affected her, and she had not been much to the Settlement. They had had tea at the A.B.C. opposite Bubwith's, and he had nearly seen her home through Regent's Park. He remembered very little of the conversation, indeed next to nothing except that he had felt inclined to tell her what was happening to him. But his mother's reply had discouraged him from asking advice, for he was not yet cynical enough to own that when one asks somebody else for advice one does not want advice, one wants an audience. On the other hand, a precocious instinct of the world told him that man may not talk of his budding love for a woman to another young woman. That was instinct, not reason, for Theresa was hardly to him woman; she was something charming; she was surrounding, like the sky. So he did not remember what they had talked about, and he was too young to know why: it was because he had talked only of himself.

He thought of it vaguely in the picture palace with Sue so near by his side, so near that he could feel against his sleeve the warmth of her arm through her thin blouse. With Theresa he had thought of himself only; with Sue he was thinking of Sue. They were happy, those two, she like a child taken for a treat to the monkey house at the Zoo, and he rather elderly, like the

people who say that there is nothing they like so well as taking children to the Zoo. She had forgotten all about him, and she bent forward, excited, to watch a cowboy drama, the central figure of a pretty girl with flowing hair, who could ride, and drive, and shoot better than any Red Indian. He watched her for one moment impersonal, her head craned forward on the strong neck, her eyes gleaming with wonder, her mouth a little open and dewy, moving as if she whispered to herself. Now and then, when something exciting happened, she said: "Oo!" as the crowd does when the fireworks go up. And sometimes, as if to make him a partner in her pleasure, she looked sideways at him and smiled. He loved her smile, the half pout of her mouth and the wrinkles that formed round her eyes, eyes black-ambushed behind long lashes.

Sue would have liked to go with him to a music hall, for she loved music halls, but they were rather dear. She was not mercenary, only she felt that here she was in the society of wealth. Why not? She remembered the men who afforded Ada Nuttall stalls, and visions of red velvet tip-up seats were in her mind. Only she was not sure that music halls were refined and, though now and then they lingered before the posters of the Camden, she dared not say anything. It never struck Huncote that such a thing could tempt her: for him the music hall would for ever be associated with that year-old night when he got drunk and fell. He did not understand her delight in the crude, the strong, the elementary; he overrated her capacity for romance, and though he overrated it he wanted to exaggerate it. He felt, though he did not know, that romance was the only way, that romance, seeker and watcher in lonely places, could alone bring them together, because the reality was so impossible that only in the unreal could they dwell. So, led by this instinct, he took her to *Monsieur Beaucaire* which a minor company was reviving one night at

the Holloway. In another mood he would have noticed the strange crowd, the fat men with fat wives in the stalls (Sue had attained to tip-up seats) which might have made one think that nobody lived in Holloway except publicans; the cheerful garishness of the scenery would have attracted him. But he was not now at the theatre with men, with flighty Flora, or impersonal Theresa; his entertainment was much more subtle: he was witnessing the drama of Sue entering into the drama. She was excited, he could see her knuckles grow white as she clenched her hands on the edge of the seat; he loved her indignation when Monsieur Beaucaire, so high-born (so like Sir Lucius, had he but known it), was treated as a barber. She was the ideal audience; sometimes she seemed about to weep, then frankly she would laugh; when she wanted to laugh she nudged him because she wanted him to share her pleasure. A few people noticed them and sighed sentimentally, thinking what a charming young couple they made. But, as the play grew all dramatic and Monsieur Beaucaire's love developed, Sue became rapt. She laughed a little hysterically when for the first time Monsieur Beaucaire touched the high-born maiden's hand. She was of the play, in the play, because these simple emotions, love, hatred, contempt, were things she could understand, could feel. She did not speak much during the intervals, and Huncote, charmed by her nearness, did not try to draw her out. It was only much later, when they left the theatre, as they went down Holloway Road, that he asked her why she was so silent.

"I don't know," she said.

They were passing a belated barrow where under a naphtha flare the fruits gleamed like honey. She stared at the bananas, then looked at him and blushed.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked.

She hesitated. "Oh, nothing in particular."

"Do tell me," said Huncote, suddenly convinced by her resistance that she hid something precious.

She blushed a deeper red. "I was only thinking."

"About what? The play?"

"Yes — that is, I was thinking that Monsieur Beaucaire was — Well, when he said to Captain Badger —" She grew excited: "You know what I mean, the part where Captain Badger says to him, 'Thank God! I'm not a Frenchman!' and he says, 'I send him my thanks with yours, sir.' Well . . ."

"Well, what did you think?"

"Oh, it's silly. But he looked so proud then, like — like you." She turned her head away quickly.

"Sue," Huncote whispered after a moment.

She did not look at him but went on by his side. The road was dark, and they were far from the theatre crowd. She did not resist or respond when he slid his arm into hers and, groping at her wrist, found her hand and held it. They did not speak, but so walked on, conscious only of the embrace of their hands, the close clinging of their warm palms. They were entirely happy just then, with love born between them, and passion yet slumbering; they were given the lull of peace that comes before the love-storm, never to come again unless the lovers can successfully navigate through troubled waters. They had nearly reached Paradise Square before they spoke again, and did not want to release each other. Just then Huncote grew self-conscious.

"Sue," he murmured, "you don't mind my holding your hand?"

The girl did not reply. She seemed to hesitate. Then suddenly she wound her fingers around his and pressed them hard as if she wanted to hurt him. She looked at him quickly and in a voice rather hoarse, said: "Good night!"

She walked away quickly, as if running away. He despised himself a little later because he had not fol-

lowed her; but as she said "Good-night" he had seen the wonder-pools of her eyes, gleaming like wood-brown water under willows . . .

Huncote was not thinking any more. The time for that had gone, the time for action come, and yet he took no action. Action was now being taken by both of them, or rather by the impenetrable, fugitive thing which was each of them, and both of them, and separate from both of them, their child and their leader.

One Saturday afternoon he tried to take her to a *matinée* at Tree's, but the house was full, and doubtless all other theatres would be full too: it was so fine, he thought it was a pity to be shut up. So he persuaded her into a taxi where she sat, feeling very grand and afraid, with the hood down and all London, she knew, looking at her, a sparkle in her eye, just like one of the children in Paradise Row when it has been given a very large sugarstick. They were stiff and self-conscious, both of them, on that triumphant drive, Sue's first drive in a taxi, an epic drive at eightpence a mile. But very soon in Battersea Park where that day there were many people playing, little boys at cricket, older boys at love, they were very close together, so close that they could have afforded silence and belonged to each other at the first touch. For the first time they spoke of love. They spoke shyly, impersonally: Huncote of what a man had said to him, Sue of the marriage of a friend; they were afraid of it, but could not avoid it. They veiled love with anecdote and report, as other classes veil it with sociology and eugenics. But in spite of her reticence Sue's attitude appeared simple.

In answer to a contradiction she said:

"Oh! I'd never want anybody else, not if I was fond of him."

Huncote thrilled as she said, "fond of him." It was so much dearer because rarer than if she had said, "If I loved him." It was more delicate too. They talked

of jealousy, and Sue, for a moment relapsing, asked him if he'd be true to eyes of blue when looking . . . They laughed, but the laughter was uneasy, and Sue innocently let him see that for her the world ended as it did in the novels of 1885: wedding bells and happiness ever after.

By imperceptible transitions they passed to the degrees of love. This because Sue had thought of Bert and told herself that after all they could still be friends. She tried to explain to Huncote without mentioning Bert the extraordinary theory that men and women can be friends, come together unattracted, remain with each other unsatisfied.

"Oh, yes," he said, "I see what you mean. Going about together and having the same tastes."

"Yes," said Sue, "it would be so nice to be friends."

They were almost alone in the plantation where the little path winds in and out between the palisade of crisscross wood. The sun fell heavy through the tall shrubs, and somewhere a bird sang. They looked at each other seriously, vaguely thinking of friendship and perhaps at the last moment hoping that friendship might protect them against love, for love is so dangerous that it is frightening. But it was no use, they knew it very well; they could not have put it into words, either of them, but the third being, their child and leader, was whispering to them that they were fools, that no longer did the man think of educating and raising the people, that the woman did not want a flirtation tempered by haughtiness. They were just two young people who had fallen in love. He put both hands upon her shoulders and felt them tremble through the thin stuff. She drew away from him and as she so did came closer. He was afraid, for the feel of those firm shoulders in his hands shook him, repelled as it drew him: this was too sharp a delight. But still, so shaken, they did not move away from each other. Indeed they drew closer, and

yet closer until she was all gathered in his arms, crumpled small as if hiding, delighted and afraid, pressing against him with all her weight as if she begged him to hold her so tight that even if she wanted to she could not run away.

"Sue," he murmured, "I love you, you've known that . . ."

She did not reply, but he thought her cheek pressed heavier against his breast. He bent down, raising her face a little so that he could look into the eyes veiled by the pale lids. "Tell me," he said again, "do you love me? Will you marry me?"

She did not reply for a long time, but there lay smiling; she was sleepy in his grasp, and he was stirred by the faint scent of her hair. As she so lay her smile was that of a child that dreams a happy dream. Then she opened her eyes and for the first time he saw them as they were, with their different colours, the opalescence of their whites and the incredulous joy in them, a little light in each eye, like a beacon.

"Oh," she said, "but . . ."

"But what?"

"But you and I — we're different."

He bent lower. "What does it matter if I love you and you love me?"

She did not reply, and for a moment over both of them hung a filmy certainty that it did matter. It passed away at once; they were Adam and Eve in the Garden, instructed, and the Serpent slunk away.

"Oh," she murmured. And moved by instinct rather than intention she raised her face a little towards his. They were all alone then, as with mingled lips and eyes drowning eyes they blotted out the world.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

THE TWILIGHT OF ST. OLAVES

I

"I s'POSE you'll be taking a holiday soon," said Churton.

Huncote looked up from the Settlement accounts which he was running through with the vouchers prior to the auditor's visit. He had not been, he found, fixing his mind very well upon the figures; he had been thinking of something else, and so he felt it quite natural to reply:

"Yes, I should say so. I might combine a holiday with a honeymoon."

"What?" cried Churton. "You're not . . ."

"Yes, I am," said Huncote defiantly, prepared to find opposition before it arose.

"Oh, well," said Churton, "my dear fellow — I — congratulate you — I'd no idea!" He paused.

Huncote was looking at him rather watchfully as if he had observed in his voice what indeed was there, envy, faint disgust. For Churton had assumed with his clerical training the attitude which the full-fledged priest often escapes. He hated matrimony or, at best, he afforded it a sort of Pauline toleration.

"You see," he went on, "I never knew there was anybody. Might I ask, do I know her?"

"Oh, yes," said Huncote airily. "Miss Susan Groby."

"Miss Susan Groby!" said Churton reflectively. "Yes, I seem to know that name . . ." He wrinkled his brows.

"Yes, you do know the name," said Huncote. "She's one of the girls who comes to the Settlement, and her mother's a washerwoman."

There was a very long silence during which the two men watched each other, Churton too surprised to do anything but keep his mouth wide open, and Huncote anxious to attack him upon the slightest provocation.

"Well, my dear fellow," said Churton, "I — I — I congratulate — I hardly know what to say. I — you — you've known her some time?" He was trying to gain a few seconds to think.

"Yes, some months," said Huncote. "You remember her, don't you? She's very dark, and I think her rather pretty; don't you?"

He felt mischievous. Churton said nothing for a moment; he remembered the girl much better than he chose to say; he too thought her pretty, and for a space she had occupied a little those over-sexed celibate thoughts of his. Yes, she was pretty and all that, but really . . . Then he made a brave effort, the sort of effort he would have made if he had been a curate; he became benevolent.

"My dear fellow, I'm very glad, very glad indeed." He leant across his desk and heartily shook Huncote's hesitating hand. "Of course it is — rather unconventional. I hope you'll be very happy — There may be — little difficulties, but then —" He made a broad gesture. "When two people care for each other — in spite of all differences . . ."

"That'll do; thanks awfully, old chap."

Huncote felt he was doing fairly well for a trial run, but he could not let Churton go on. He returned to the accounts. Once or twice, when he half-looked up, he could see Churton watching him with an extraordinary expression: he was looking at him as one looks at the man who steps out of the crowd when a taxi runs into a bus and offers his card to the policeman; there was

admiration in the look, disapproval, incredulity. Still, it had gone off all right, and when Huncote returned to the Settlement in the evening it was clear that the Committee, who received the information in the afternoon, had passed *nem con* an amazed resolution to take it smiling.

Miss Miskin inclined to be slightly tearful and acrid as she clasped his hands in her saurian fingers. Platt was large and bold and beaming, and smacked him on the shoulder several times, after which he asked him not to be too rash, and generally conveyed a mixed impression of concern for the preservation of the upper classes tempered by regard for the claims of democracy. And Mrs. Ramsey said she was glad to hear he was going to marry her, her voice carrying an indefinable hint that she was surprised, presumably, because it had not occurred to Huncote to use a method more habitual and ending in Buenos Ayres. It all went very well, and the few frequenters of the Settlement who found out merely gaped at him. Huncote did not have to talk to them about his marriage, but it was quite clear that they looked upon him as a man removed, whether for hanging or for coronation it was impossible to tell. Indeed all would have gone admirably if later in the evening George Green had not appeared in the lobby flushed with information.

"Good evening, Mr. 'Uncote, congratulate you! I hear you're going to settle down?"

"Yes," said Huncote.

"Nothing like it, my boy, nothing like it! I know the lady, very nice lady too." A flush rose into the pudgy white cheeks. "Remember her quite well; I'd a dance with her the other time, you remember. No 'arm in it. Some girls, I don't say." He prodded Huncote with his elbow. "Eh, wot? But not Miss Groby." Huncote suddenly felt very hot about the eyes; he did not reply and George Green went on:

"You take it from me, she's a nice girl, she is. I know something about girls, living in St. Panwich all me life. Some of them — well, red pepper ain't in it. I could tell you a thing or two." Churton came in and, much to his horror, Green proceeded to tell Huncote a thing or two, the usual sort of thing:

"Used to take 'em down to Brighton for the week-end," said the builder. Then sentimentally he added: "Happy days!" But his attention again concentrated on Huncote, who was moving from right to left, trying to get past him to the door. "D'you know, Mr. 'Uncote," he said, "if you'll excuse me saying so, I didn't think you were that sort. I never saw you making goo-goo eyes. I thought you were one of the serious lot, like our friend there." He jerked his thumb towards Churton. "And for all I know, there you've been every night under her window gargling a little love-song." He nudged him. "Sly dog!" He laughed, and Huncote was filled with a rage which prevented him from speaking. Then Green said: "Well, wish you luck! Shouldn't mind if it was me instead of you; she's a nice little bit of crackling!"

As the door opened to frame the kindly amplitudes of Platt, Huncote drew back and struck Green full upon the jaw. The fat man seemed to hang helplessly in the air for a second and then came crashing down to the floor.

"Huncote!" cried Churton. "Good heavens!"

Platt hurried into the room to pick up one of his chief supporters. Green was half stunned.

"Never heard of such a thing in my life," Platt cried, while Churton stood in front of Huncote as if afraid that he might hit the builder while he was down.

"Look here," he said hurriedly, "get out of it quick; we'll make it all right. It mustn't get about."

Huncote did not reply; his body was thrilling with the reaction from his fury. But his knuckles hurt a

little, and it had been delicious to feel the teeth outlined under the cheek as he hit it. Churton took him by the arm.

"Look here, do get out, he's coming to; we'll make it all right."

"If he wants any more . . ." said Huncote quietly.

"Oh, don't be a silly ass."

Platt raised his head: "Yes, do go away, Huncote."

Green sat up; he looked stupid, with one side of his collar burst away from the stud and a big purple mark on his jaw. Huncote laughed, half-hysterically.

"Oh, all right," he said, "I s'pose I'll have to apologise; see you all to-morrow."

He went out.

There were no consequences. The next morning he publicly apologised to Green, explaining that he had been over-wrought. Green understood, he quite understood.

"Let bygones be bygones," he said. "Now you'll be wantin' a house in town, Mr. 'Uncote. That bit of land — the fly-fishing school, that ain't sold yet, eh?" He nudged him.

Just as Huncote was about to leave the Settlement to go to St. Olaves he ran into Mr. Ford. Fighting Bill almost embraced him.

"Good boy! Good boy!" he repeated endlessly. "Wish I'd seen it, didn't think you had the guts. Let me feel your deltoid." He thrust his hand into Roger's waistcoat and pawed his shoulder and breast. "Not bad! You come along to me one evening, and I'll make a man of you. Nothing like it in married life, my boy! You ask my missus what I do to her on Saturday nights."

They laughed together. Huncote liked Fighting Bill; he was a man. A few hours later he was at St. Olaves.

II

His impulse as he entered the house was to cry out: "I'm going to marry a washerwoman's daughter!" But reserve struggled with exultation and defiance; in the evening he wasted a chance of speaking to his mother alone and solemnly joined in family auction at two-pence-ha'penny a hundred. When the game ended after two rubbers, and Elspeth and Flora went to bed, he hung about a little, opening books and looking at pictures that he had known all his life, sitting down, crossing and uncrossing his legs, and yawning without showing any intention of going to bed. Enough in fact to convince Mrs. Huncote that he had something on his mind. She taxed him with it, and he vehemently denied it. As she was accustomed to the sort of man who cannot explain she gave him a drink and sent him to bed, hoping it was not hay fever. Roger passed a mixed night in which he planned scenes of fierce contest and magnificent speeches, beginning: "Mother and sisters," and containing a great deal about the equality of mankind. Had he but known it, he was inconceivably like Bert Caldwell. At other times, when he woke up, which happened frequently, he prepared tactful openings, cunning little leading-ups from the condition of the cathedral to questions as to whether the Dean ever officiated at weddings, and then it would be simple. He had a very bad appetite at breakfast.

Then Huncote, having been tactful all night, displayed the ignorance of the innocent and pure. He tackled his mother . . . He did not realise that one does not talk to everybody at the same time; he should have known that the time for a man is halfway through the after-dinner cigar; that the time for a young girl is half an hour after lunch, when she is feeling well and wondering what she will do next, and generally interested and vivid; but that the time for a matron is not

after lunch, when she wants to lie down, nor before lunch when dishing-up is on her mind, nor just before tea when she is sleepy and sulky, nor just after breakfast when she is thinking over what that morning she must order and buy; he should have known that there are only two hours for the matron, apart from the over-public tea-time: a little while after this soothing tea, and before she has begun to bother about dressing, or the quiet restfulness of after dinner, particularly if she smokes. No, quite suddenly, when Mrs. Huncote was thinking that she must tell Betty to take the drawing-room curtains down, ask Trunch whether the mare was better, and make a list including the plumber, Mudie's and, above all, the stationer in view of a new time-table, he said:

"Mother! What would you say if I told you I was going to get married?"

Mrs. Huncote stared. He was blushing; but for his clothes anybody could have seen he was blushing all over, but he felt much better: out at last!

"Married? Roger?" said Mrs. Huncote uneasily. "Oh — of course, I know you'll get married some day, still I didn't expect — I — I didn't know there was anybody — Who is it?"

Huncote hesitated, and his blush grew hotter.

"Well, Mother, I'm afraid you haven't met her; she lives in London."

"Yes," said Mrs. Huncote encouraging, "but why didn't you tell me before?"

"It was rather sudden," he murmured desperately.

"Oh!" Then her preoccupation with plumber and stationer intruded on her; she grew a little sharp. "But do tell me all about it, Roger; one might think you thought I didn't care. What's her name? Where did you meet her?"

"Mother," said Huncote, with a great effort, "it's so difficult."

Mrs. Huncote guessed. "Roger!" she whispered. "You don't mean to say . . ." Horrible visions of tow-headed barmaids rushed through her mind. Young men did that sort of thing at Oxford. A suspicion crossed her mind. "You aren't married already, Roger?"

He looked offended.

"As if I could do such a thing without asking you."

Mrs. Huncote grew more and more suspicious.

"Are you quite sure you're asking me? It sounds rather as if you were telling me."

"But what am I to do?" cried Huncote, jumping up and walking agitatedly round the table. "Oh, you must let me speak plainly — she's not one of us, you see. She's quite young — and I know you'll think her pretty — and I know you'll like her, only don't make up your mind in advance, don't be against it before you know."

"I'm not against it," said Mrs. Huncote, "but you're putting me against it. What are you hiding? Who is she?" Mrs. Huncote was definitely frightened now.

"She works."

"Well, lots of girls do. What does she do?"

"She helps her mother."

"Oh! What does her mother do?"

Huncote performed on himself what amounted to a surgical operation.

"She — washes — fine laces and all that," he added hurriedly.

Mrs. Huncote remained blankly silent.

"Oh, it's no use pretending; I've only seen her mother once; they're quite — well, you know the sort of people, hard-working, nice, respectable people. Of course, I don't expect you to like the idea; only you should see Sue."

"Sue?" asked Mrs. Huncote.

"Yes, her name's Sue; Susan Groby. She used to come to the Settlement. She's frightfully pretty."

"Of course," said Mrs. Huncote.

"Oh, Mother, don't say of course like that! It's something else; she's so sweet and gentle, and innocent, and . . . Oh, well, I can't help it, I've just got to marry her."

"Got to marry her?" asked Mrs. Huncote. "What d'you mean, Roger? It's no use being shy now. Do you mean to say that you've placed her in such a position that you've got to marry her?"

He did not understand for a moment; then he flushed with indignation.

"Mother! How can you! Oh, if you knew her you wouldn't say a thing like that."

"Sorry. Only you put it in that way. So it amounts to this: you're going to marry the daughter of a washerwoman, and you're asking me to say 'Yes.' The point is — would it be any use my saying 'No'?" She asked this because on her previous question she had seen his eyebrows knit together in that familiar, obstinate frown. Now he did not reply, and her heart grew small and shrunken, for the son who does not disabuse his mother when for a moment she doubts her power over him has become a man. Bitterly she quoted to herself two lines of Yeats. Half-aloud she murmured:

"I kiss you, I kiss you, my pigeon, my own,
How I shall miss you when you have grown."

"What am I to say? I can't say 'Yes' just like that. You know what I said the other day when you talked to me about Mr. Corry. Oh, Roger! Oh! There was no Mr. Corry! It was you, wasn't it? Oh, it wasn't fair."

He looked at her miserably: no, of course it wasn't fair, it wasn't straight. But what was he to do? He shifted.

"Yes, you said something about class then, didn't you?"

"I didn't know it was you."

"No, but you'd have said the same thing, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, more or less. You know I'm not mad on class, don't you? But still . . ."

"But still you think it won't work?"

"How can I tell?" asked Mrs. Huncote.

Mrs. Huncote went out to shop and during the whole of that day the situation developed. Elspeth was told: she was perfectly clear that this was preposterous. She shocked her mother very much by wishing Roger had sowed more wild oats. As for Flora, she behaved still worse, for she declared that it was just like Pygmalion, and wondered within Mrs. Huncote's hearing whether Sue said "Not likely" or more extensively garnished the remark.

There was another small scene at dinner: the situation was so grave that Mrs. Huncote postponed her journey to Harrogate, and left herself in the position almost inconceivable to her class of not going away in August. The battle lasted three days and was, if not won, at least saved from defeat not by the justice of Huncote's cause, but by the savage opposition of Elspeth, which created a reaction in Mrs. Huncote's breast. Mrs. Huncote was destroyed by her own ally. It was saved too by some new reflections in Flora's brain: Roger would doubtless have a nice house instead of those dreadful rooms in St. Panwich; if he did not marry Sue he might not marry anybody for years, while if he did . . . Well, she could go and stay with them, with a chaperone who did not chaperone! That would make the way easy for somebody quite new, called Peter. Also it would be no end of a rag.

"Bring her to see me," said Mrs. Huncote warily, as she kissed Roger good-by.

III

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Groby.

"Same 'ere," said Mr. Groby.

"Now yer sorry yer didn't let 'er try for that there scholarship at 'Arrods."

"I never 'ad no edication," said Mr. Groby. "It never done me no 'arm."

"Ah! But think o' the good it might 'ave done yer," said Mrs. Groby, begging the question.

Mr. Groby thought for a while.

"Any'ow," he said, "it'll keep yer out o' the work-ouse."

Outside, in Paradise Row, Muriel passed with the faithful Romeo who was playing "Who Were You With Last Night?" upon a mouth-organ.

IV

It had been rather awkward, for Mrs. Groby beamed and almost bobbed as if she were still a Sussex child, and called him Sir, and looked very hot, and had been ashamed to wipe her face. And Mr. Groby, who had come specially early on this Saturday afternoon instead of passing the rest of the day at his club, found it very difficult to talk to Huncote. They had stared at each other mostly, the fastidious young man trying hard to be easy with one who would soon expect him to call him Father; Mrs. Groby always called him Father, but this did not seem to make things easier, indeed more difficult. As for Mr. Groby, a big red-faced person of forty-five, rather bald except where his grey hair was dyed black, after offering Huncote a woodbine he found himself with his mouth open. Then to show that they were quite at ease, he became effusively familiar, told him he was one of the right sort, and asked him which

way he voted. An indication of Huncote's views, Young Liberal Socialism brand, eased things a little as it enabled Mr. Groby to wax sanguinary about that ginger-ale lot. Politics, Huncote thought, simplified matters, for however different men might be they would, he supposed, always discover invigorating hatreds. Then he looked at the dirty saucepans on the table and for a second wondered whether he could go on with this. But Sue was there, and she was so happy, so embarrassed, so afraid, so anxious all should go well, and so proud of him.

She left him for a moment to put on her hat, and he stayed alone with Mr. and Mrs. Groby and Muriel. Muriel was being condescending and worldly: Did he not think the hobble skirt unbecoming? (while keeping open an anxious ear for the strains outside of "Who Were You With Last Night?"). Huncote felt like a cat on a wardrobe in a room with several dogs, wondering what will happen when it comes down. But as Sue came in her eyes sought his and not those of anybody else. They were soft, half-ashamed, and they held that humid glow which he felt was there only for him. He knew that his smile answered her, paid tribute to her loveliness, her innocence, to the dream of an unborn day. They went silent in the street, and he thought her beautiful. Her clothes were appalling. She was wearing her best summer dress: light pink, touched up with light green; there were bows on her shoulders, and frills round her wrists, irrelevant knobs and strips of lace about her hips, bars of insertion on her breast; every pure line of body and limb she spoiled and broke. And her gloves, dark brown kid, must have been drawn on with a buttonhook. Only the Providence of Lovers, that is also the Providence of Fools, saved Huncote from observing that skirt and petticoat were too long behind and too short in front, that there were dreadful bunchings of stuff, knots of laces all over the ill-fitting

stays that made a horizontal line at the back under the young shoulders. For he loved her and looked only into her eyes, content to read there the shy message of their welcome. He was the victim of a tragedy: to be blind when loving for the first time, a preparation to having sight and loving no more.

They sat in a perfect circle in Mrs. Huncote's drawing-room, Sue so anxious that she found herself staring in turn at Mrs. Huncote, at Elspeth, at Flora; whenever she caught herself at it she turned away quickly, nervously crossing and recrossing her feet, looking with amazement and disquiet at the Sèvres clock, the assegaïs upon the wall, the many books lying about which she had never seen before outside a bookseller's window. It was not going too badly. They talked about the heat at first, and how trying it was. Mrs. Huncote drew from Sue that it was nice being in the country after St. Panwich. This led to the merits of St. Olaves, and Mrs. Huncote became topographic. Elspeth said not a word. She maintained a protesting and inspectorial air. Flora, after trying very hard not to laugh, let herself go and laughed at everything. She was easier.

"Oh, you'll like it here," she said, "when you see a little of the country. There's the Char,—you must have seen it from the train."

"Yes, Sue," said Huncote, "that's the river; I showed it you, you know." He tried to be easy. "I'll have to teach you to fish."

Mrs. Huncote raised her eyebrows, but Flora gallantly helped.

"Oh, Mother, I know what you're going to say; you're going to say fishing's cruel."

"Not with nets," said Mrs. Huncote.

Mrs. Huncote was chipped as to her humanitarianism tempered by a liking for trout. During the chipping Sue remained uneasy, playing with her fingers. It was all very wonderful, she thought, this talk about trout,

though she did not understand what Roger was saying about a cast, and what could have happened to the back of Flora's neck when Roger was trying for an eddy, or a neddy, or something. Then she felt she must say something. "Nice little fish. There's a fishmonger in the High Street has a whole lot of them in a tank, all alive. They fry, don't they?"

"I'm not quite sure," said Mrs. Huncote, "but I should say they would fry."

There was a pause and Elspeth said, with a snarl:

"We'd better ask cook."

Huncote hated Elspeth just then; Flora who, with all her mischievousness, had some tact, suggested they should go into the garden. They did not go at once, for the journey still had to be discussed, and Flora had to argue with her brother about through trains. But at last they reached the garden, all except Elspeth, who had something to do in the town. That made things easier; persuaded by Huncote, Sue took off her hat. He felt that it would be better if she took off that hat, for it had sage-green ribbons which clashed with the lettuce green of her frock. He was right, for as soon as he had done so Mrs. Huncote laid upon her a long observant gaze.

Yes, she was pretty; she was more than pretty. They made a charming picture, Mrs. Huncote thought, those two, Flora with her delicate skin of white and rose, her laughing grey eyes, and Sue, sombre and brooding under her heavy black locks. It was extraordinary. Could it be made just possible? Huncote was talking to her but she did not listen; she was thinking of a parlour-maid she once had who, after a few years, developed a strange artistic taste in the arrangement of flowers, who kept her hands so nicely too, no one knew how. She sighed.

"Why do you sigh, Mother?" asked Huncote.

She looked at him, smiling a little; the others were out of earshot.

"How can you ask? This — it's not exactly what I wanted, is it?"

"Don't you like her?" he asked urgently.

"I can hardly . . . It's too early to say . . . She's very pretty."

"Yes," said Huncote.

And together for a moment they looked at Flora and Sue. Flora was talking and laughing, and Sue stood listening with a little smile while she played with the hectic bells of a great fuchsia bush. She did not know what she was doing, and with her hand outstretched, crushing a little between her brown fingers the passionate bloom, she looked small and desolate, as if appealing. A heavy shadow fell from a tree upon her face, made her all dark and secret, loaded with mystery the pathos of her eyes.

As if by agreement Mrs. Huncote took her apart. They went together along the path to the wall upon which, exquisitely spread, were the young peaches beginning to blush. At first Mrs. Huncote talked alone: Did Sue like her work? What sort of life had she? Had she any brothers and sisters? To which Sue answered "Yes" and "No." It was not so bad now, she thought: in the drawing-room she had wanted to say, "Yes, mum," but it was not so here. She looked more confidently at this nice old lady: pretty Mrs. Huncote seemed very old to a young girl accustomed to seeing women old at thirty. It helped her that Mrs. Huncote should be old, and, little by little, she confided in her.

"Have you known my son long?" asked Mrs. Huncote.

"No, not exactly long," said Sue, blushing. "On and off for eight or nine months, but it was only lately that he . . ." She grew dumb.

"Yes," said Mrs. Huncote encouragingly, "that you grew fond of each other."

Sue made a great effort and dug her toe into the gravel, but could only get out a stifled "Yes."

Then Mrs. Huncote said:

"He seems very fond of you."

After a while Sue, who seemed to have been thinking, said:

"Who'd have thought it?"

And strangely enough Mrs. Huncote was not offended, for Sue seemed so sincere, so overcome. That helped her and Mrs. Huncote said:

"It's no use saying things like that — Sue; it just happens, doesn't it?"

For a moment Sue did not reply. It was not only that Mrs. Huncote had called her by her name, but the sudden softening of the tone moved her. She felt warmed, accepted, and, without any artfulness, she increased her advantage. With clasped hands she turned to the mother and murmured thickly:

"Oh, Mrs. Huncote, it's like a dream. I never thought of anybody like him. He's like — well, I don't know, only it always makes me feel not good enough. I used to think a lot of myself, you know, but that's all over." Mrs. Huncote smiled. "You needn't smile, it's quite true. He's — he looks like one of those men in armour in the pictures. And when he talks it makes me think of . . ."

"Of what?"

"Oh, silly things. Birds."

"Foolish child!" said Mrs. Huncote.

But she was moved, and it almost hurt her. She had a fleeting memory of the dead colonel, of the first time they danced at the hunt ball, thirty years before. He had said something so idiotic and delightful, made her go out with him into the grounds of the Assembly Room at Dorchester. She remembered: "Come into the garden and be the nightingale." She pulled herself up. Now! No sentiment! But she looked at Sue, who was

staring at the peaches with her mouth fallen open, a little wistful, as if she asked for kindness as well as for love.

"Foolish child!" she said again. — "I envy you," and slipped her hand along the girl's arm.

Life's calculated artistry piled bathos on pathos. There was tea and difficulty with the thin bread-and-butter, and there was Flora, anxious to put Sue at her ease by professing a delight in pink roses for hats. A little strain came again, for Huncote did not know what his mother had said, and he was thinking of the Grobys.

He was still thinking of the Grobys when they got into the train, he and his silent girl. Six o'clock: perhaps Mr. Groby was tight. Again he wondered whether he could go on: but they had a carriage to themselves, and as soon as the train started Sue flung herself into his arms. "We're alone," she whispered.

Then he understood. As he held her close-folded he knew that he was alone in a hostile world with the only creature who really loved him, that is, who loved him without understanding him. It was wonderful to be taken like that; she sheltered him from the world: for a moment she made the world, she was all his. He had a vision of her as one who had long been in the making for him; she was an angel, still and dark, looking at him from under her brows and smiling. As he felt her in his arms, quiescent, every fibre of her body told him: "I am yours, and you are mine, and I love you. I was parted from you by the unknown past, and yet I was always with you. Come to me, and you shall have all of me that you want,— body, understanding, simplicity; you shall be my counsel and my child, my protector and my charge; you shall be my leader and my playmate, and suffer with me, and laugh with me, and weep with me, for you are all mine, my heart."

They parted in Paradise Row. He had kissed her much, and yet he wanted again to do so: the custom of

244 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

the place allowed it, so securely she raised her lips to his. He felt degraded and delighted as, for the first time in his life, he kissed a woman in the street.

She smiled darkly. "Ta-ta, be good," she said.

V.

He was excited and he feared the hurrying on of gladness and of doom. He wanted her: yes, he knew that; he wanted her not only as a woman because she was beautiful, but he wanted her presence, the consciousness of her. He liked to see her move, to hear her voice, the low voice that was so clear when she laughed. He talked to her a great deal and asked her questions just to hear that voice. Besides, they had much to talk of. There was quite a long argument as to the date of the marriage which was fixed for the first week in October. When he asked her to "name the day", she said:

"Oh, Roger! Isn't it a bit early? Why, we've only just got engaged."

"Well," he said, "you're going to marry me, aren't you?"

"Yes, but . . ."

He realised; he remembered the long engagements in her class.

"All right," he said, "we can put it off a little; what about this day five years?"

"Five years 's rather long," said Sue, quite serious.

He laughed. "But don't you understand, Sue, that I'm not going to wait for you for five years!"

"Don't think it worth it, is that it?" asked Sue.

"Don't be silly. I'm not going to wait for you five years or five months."

"Well, it ought to be a year, don't you think? Quite a year?"

He grew impatient. "But, Sue, you don't understand; people only wait because they can't afford to get

married. They'd like to get married at once. At least, I expect so."

Sue did not understand; all she knew was that every one of her married friends had waited anything between one year and five years, except one who waited ten, and there you are. But Roger too did not understand; he did not know that girls such as Sue fear marriage because marriage does not emancipate as it does in the bourgeoisie; because marriage means that the self-supporting girl abandons the freedom of her work and possibly a good wage for uncertain dependence upon a man, a man who may become like other men, rather drunken and sometimes brutal.

The deadlock was ended by violence: Roger threatened to buy a special license and to marry her that week. Terrified and delighted, she had to give in when she heard that a special license cost thirty pounds; that would be too dreadful, so they would be married early in October.

VI

She said: "Won't you give me a little photo of yourself?"

"Of course I will."

"Quite a little one? Big as a shilling?"

"But why only as big as a shilling?"

"To put in a locket to wear round my neck." She blushed.

He laughed. No, she should have a big one. He didn't want her to wear his photo like that. He did not want her to look like — well, like what she was. But it was early and he was charmed.

VII

There was a house to find, there were clothes to buy, there was clergyman and choir to think of. Decisions

must be taken as to where the reception should be held, and the honeymoon must be thought of. But Huncote thought of other things too, of trifles in her behaviour and clothing which annoyed him a very little, even in those moments when he loved her. He began to think of it the day he broke her necklace.

It was evening as he saw her home. They were in sportive mood, and she said he had kissed her enough. He struggled with her, she breathless and hiding her face with her hands. As he tore her hands away, masterful and tender, he caught a finger in the necklace; the thread broke, and the sham pearls fell all over the pavement where in their excitement they did not notice them until they had trampled half of them into powder.

"Oh, my pearls!" Sue cried. Then she looked as if about to weep.

"Never mind, sweetheart, I'll give you another necklace to-morrow."

"Will you really?" She smiled, forgetting the past and thinking only of to-morrow, for she loved him.

But when it came to buying the necklace, he hesitated. He had the prejudice of his education against sham jewellery of any kind — and so many girls at the Settlement wore sham pearls. No, he could not buy those. He thought of something more overwhelming, real pearls. Only he was not sure that Sue would like them as well as the sham, for they would be small. Accidentally he discovered the shop in Oxford Street where they sell queer, cheap jewellery from Italy or the East. He was proud when he brought Sue her necklace; it was very pretty, made of gilt wood on an Italian model, of carved, wooden spheres, separated by blue stones decorated with gold designs. He clasped it round her neck, and thought she looked barbaric. But she fingered the pendant and seemed disconsolate.

"Don't you like it?" he asked.

"Well," she said, "it's quaint." She pouted a little. "Thought you said you'd get me some pearls."

"Oh!" he cried. "Don't you see it's beautiful? that it isn't like everybody's? I assure you it's a beautiful thing."

"It is quaint," she said ungraciously.

He knew there was something a little wrong; ornaments, clothes, he didn't quite know what; he knew too little of women to say. He wished some woman, somebody like Flora, a woman who knew, would help her. But he shrank from contact between his sister and his bride. Suddenly he thought of Theresa.

It was a queer interview. Theresa, of course, knew, and she let him go on to the end, but he found it difficult.

"You see what I mean," he said, at length. "You know how sweet she is; I know you like her. Only, having been brought up like that, it's so difficult."

"Yes," she said, "I understand. Of course I'll help you." And almost added: "You child!" "Tell her to come and see me, or rather I'll take her out myself; it'll be all right." She smiled: "She shall be a regular fashion plate! Will that satisfy you? She shall have coats and skirts like everybody, and she shall not wear any but handsewn blouses; she'll be so like everybody that you won't be able to tell her! Will that satisfy you? She shan't only *be* good enough for you, but she shall look it!"

There had been in the words "good enough for you" an intonation rather peculiar. For a moment Roger felt awkward, but he was in no mood for introspection; so he told himself he was only thinking what a good friend Theresa was. As he went he thanked her again. He felt impulsive.

"You're the best of friends." Then, before she could elude him, he kissed her softly on the cheek.

Theresa was alone. Evening was coming. She

went to the window and looked out over the low houses opposite, over the canal, so dull, like lead, save where the setting sun touched it. It was not so warm now, and soon it would be dusk. She thought of the night, the night that would be cold after the heat of the day. She did not know just then exactly what she felt. She could not tell herself that she was losing the man she wanted; all she knew, as the sun dipped below the house, was the fading of its glory heralded an enclosing night. A greyness fell over the sky and over something within her that felt sick with weakness.

VIII

"I say!" said Sue. "I've been showing that necklace of yours to a girl. She *was* gone on it."

"Oh?"

"And I've sort of taken to it too." She fingered the pendant. "It's lovely, ain't it? They can't do that sort of work in England."

His emotion was both suave and deep. So she had learnt! She could understand the beautiful, could see quickly! One only had to show it to her, and she forgot all vulgar things. He held her close. Oh! How wonderful she could be! The vision of a Sue renewed and made peerless which he had seen after the night by the river formed again. It intoxicated him. It did not occur to him that she had followed where another girl led.

IX

They were grouped in the drawing-room, about thirty people. A quiet little party, for Mrs. Huncote had done what she could. There had been wrangles because Flora wanted silver-edged invitations; more wrangles because Huncote objected to wedding presents. In fact, for a while, he conducted a single-handed battle

against his own family and the Grobys too, because he wanted quietly to go round to the registrar's with Sue and two witnesses at half a crown a head. Mrs. Huncote might have given way thankfully, only Mrs. Groby, remembering her aunt who had left all that money to the blacks in Africa, was determined to get value for the lost inheritance out of the Church. And Sue did not help much. When Huncote came to her and offered to elope to the registrar's she looked at him half-frightened.

"Oh!" she said. "I shouldn't feel properly married!"

He pressed her. She grew mutinous and for a moment quite ugly with a dark obstinate face.

"All my friends been to the church," she said curtly.

He grew angry, she wept. Then they kissed, and he felt a brute. Later he changed his mind and there were more quarrels; there was even a quarrel at Paradise Row in presence of the amalgamated Grobys. Muriel came out strong.

"A church," she declared, "is so much more lady-like."

Perce went round to Huncote on the sly and offered to kidnap Sue for him for a tanner. But Huncote thought of Mrs. Ramsey and the white slave traffic, and refused.

All might have been well and the wedding have taken place at All Souls St. Panwich, but Huncote, exasperated by this battering on all sides, continually entangled in theological arguments with Mrs. Groby who wanted to serve the Church out, with Mrs. Huncote who did not believe in it, but knew that everybody who was anybody got married in church (unless they were intellectual and went in for free love), was brought to such a pitch of exasperation by discovering a letter from the C. O. S. to Elspeth who as a sort of last hope had been enquiring whether there was anything against the

Grobys, that he suddenly declared he would have a raging and tearing wedding, and at St. Olaves. The silver-edged invitation cards were printed; they would have been sent if Elspeth had not quietly got hold of the bundle, destroyed most of them, and told him only too late. Huncote wrote to the Dean, asking him to officiate in person, but was fortunately foiled by a previous engagement of the prelate.

He was furious and resolute and, outwitting his family, on the morning of the wedding he disembarked a blue Hungarian band and six dozen of champagne. He was very unhappy in those days and yet delighted. He was almost forgetting Sue and the gaining of his desire, for he saw very little of her now, with Theresa rushing her around the town to dressmakers, and milliners, and bootmakers, in a triumphant and reforming progress which left behind it the shattered remains of machine-made blouses and three-and-elevenpenny stays. Sue became a phantom . . . Sue was manicured . . .

So Huncote flung himself upon that wedding with the determination that might have inspired him had he sworn to drown a greedy cat in cream. He happened to read *The Blue Lagoon* in those days and thought they did these things better in Polynesia. But still among this welter of contending wills, of reluctances, of clamorous prejudices, of social assumptions, of abominable prying into the most exquisite things, the solemn institution of marriage rumbled on, caring very little in its eternal course what lay under its juggernaut wheels. Sue might weep, but banns were called.

There was quite a little crowd that soft October day, with the hollyhocks blowsy and dusty, and the chrysanthemums beginning to mourn the dead summer. The two parties had clotted rather; there was a proud young group made up of Flora, Peter, in a highly brushed condition, Cuthbert and Sawbones Junior to represent her glamorous past. There was a minor

canon and his wife who looked at everybody as if they saw them through lorgnettes; the doctor lurked behind a big black moustache out of which he now and then burst like a sharpshooter, inadequately restrained by a precise little wife who might have been made of chilled steel painted pink, so clean were her lines. There were locals too, some of the locals whose invitations Elspeth had not been able to stop. And some relatives: Mrs. Huncote's mother, old Mrs. Farnell, with exquisite white curls and a trembling bonnet on the back of her head. Old Mrs. Farnell was to be very helpful by and by, for her bonnet and its angle served as a link between her and Mrs. Groby who, unfortunately, had added to her own bonnet velvet ribbon of that peculiar pale crimson which recalls raspberry fool. There were more Farnells too, Rear Admiral Farnell, Mrs. Huncote's brother, with his wife,— he inclined to be jovial and she to consider the crowd with the tolerance that fills a naval wife in non-service circles. On the Huncote side was only Miss Huncote, the maiden aunt, accompanied by her transformation. Later she had a conversation with Mr. Groby, which mystified her very much because he continually alluded to the yard. She first thought he was an ostler and, when seeking information, was told by the doctor that he meant the boneyard, which was not enlightening. And there was Perce who wondered when the eating would start. Whenever he asked Muriel that question he was heavily snubbed and told that eating was not gentlemanly. But Perce, whose breakfast had been forgotten in the morning hurry, was possessed, and the results threatened to be serious. Grabbing was in Perce's mind. There was Grandpa Challow, brought from Sussex by the Grobys. He was a delightful old man, nearly eighty. Mrs. Huncote fell in love with him when he said:

“I'm unaccountable glad to meet you, Mrs. Hun-

cote; he's a nice boy. He's the nicest boy I seen for a long time."

"I'm glad you like him," she said.

"I do, surely."

Outside in the garden, unrestrained, the band was violently banding. Huncote, for a moment undisturbed, sat at the window staring out. He had escaped the Farnell country cousins in their country clothes, and with a sort of savage delight noted that they wore bows upon their shoulders: his wife knew better than that by now, so he scored off the Wiltshire end of the family. There was a buzz of talk behind him and some laughter. He felt depressed. He was glad behind his depression, for it was nearly over, and he had had a glimpse of Sue just long enough for her to smile. But it had all been so complicated and hard, and he felt tired. In front of him, between two faded hollyhock stems, a great autumn spider sat in its web; it was beautiful and sinister, with a yellow cross upon its back, motionless as if from the moist dead leaves there came already a breath of murderous winter.

He alighted from the carriage, helped out Mrs. Groby and his mother. Mrs. Groby fell. It seemed very long, the wait near the altar, with Sue missing. He wondered why the bridegroom mattered so little in a wedding, and why everybody was anxious about the bride. The crowd seemed very small in the church, and the bride's side would have been empty had not some of the Huncotes filled it up. Mrs. Groby would have asked a few friends if the wedding had happened in St. Panwich, but she had not the courage to bring them to St. Olaves. She did not mind. She had been torn between gentility and auld lang syne; gentility won. There was a little hush, some craning forward of heads, a noise as everybody turned from the altar to watch the coming of the bride with her father who was to give her away. Huncote grew conscious of some-

thing in white, large and floriferous, which followed Sue, Ada Nuttall, of course, and of Churton at his side begging him to be steady . . .

Who was this stranger girl he was to wed? She seemed so different in the gown of white chiffon. It made her look so dark; her eyes were downcast and she seemed stern; her mouth was set and its lovely curves gone; even her hair looked strange; he wondered where the beautiful curls had gone. He did not know that Theresa's battle had not been entirely won and that, in spite of orders, Sue had supplemented the natural curl by putting her hair in papers the night before: this made a curious combination with the wave the hair-dresser had given it that morning . . .

And now they were side by side, kneeling. For a moment Huncote felt religious. Then he noticed the vicar's boots! His elbow touched Sue's, and he pressed it as if to reassure her, really to reassure himself, for he did not know what awful thoughts had stolen the curves from her mouth,—that she was hot all over as she waited for the moment when Bert Caldwell would, as in the story "True Till Death", step out from behind a pillar and say: "I forbid the banns! This woman who stands here is my affianced wife!"

But nothing happened. As she said "I will" she thought of Bert without a qualm, for she loved this man, this strange shining creature by her side. Only she wondered whether Bert would go to Australia. Then again she said: "I will." And as Huncote placed the ring upon her finger she squeezed his hand hard as if begging him to hold it so that none might hurt her . . .

It was very different after, as they stood side by side in the drawing-room being congratulated. For Sue saw everything with relief rather than triumph, and so she was beautiful. The chiffon fell softly from her shoulders, ample over the arms to where the long white

gloves left bare the smooth skin. The white silk of the loose-laced corselet, the straight, soft folds of flimsy white that fell from her hips to her white-shod feet, hid little of the graciousness of her lines, half-virginal, half-mature. Theresa must have done something to her hair after the church, Mrs. Huncote thought, for it looked looser, and thick and dark against the pallor of the orange-blossom. The groups formed again. The locals solidified around the minor canon and his wife, while Mrs. Farnell, conscious of the power of the fifteen-inch naval guns and of the traditions of Drake, formed a rival crowd mainly of relations who were tending to clot. The country cousins, together with Mrs. Farnell, Miss Huncote, and Elspeth, were beginning with ostentatious aloofness to exchange the family confidences and evil reports which are suitable when relations come together: the naval wife sat on the quarter-deck of the good ship *Farnell-Huncote*. Perce ate at last as quickly as his high collar would let him, and Muriel fascinatedly walked around and around the doctor's wife, trying to find out how she got into her apparently seamless garment. Huncote, determined to do his duty, monopolised Mr. Groby. Mr. Groby and his family had begun numbly, staring, saying "Yes, Sir" and "Yes, Mum," though they tried to keep it down. The fashion, the munificence paralysed them. Now Huncote regretted having ordered so much champagne, for Mr. Groby was becoming louder and louder on the subject of the Old Mogul. "Never been to the Old Mogul? Why! Where was you born? The times I used to 'ave there with old Joe Bates! They don't know wat a music 'all is nowadays." He went on: "They used to call it the Bloodpot, they did, and no wonder. Why, I remember . . ."

Huncote tried to prevent him from remembering too loud. But the other Grobys were creating a small scene. The two children and their mother stood fasci-

nated before a tableload of wedding presents; Mrs. Groby patted an awful black marble clock, presented by the country cousins. "My!" she said, "that's wot I call a clock." She stopped Mrs. Farnell. "It's the dead spit of the one as my aunt Elizabeth used ter 'ave. Wot d'yer think that corst?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Mrs. Farnell, trying to escape.

"Well, it's got yer name on it," said Mrs. Groby.

"I beg your pardon. That's my sister-in-law's name."

"Why! Didn't yer talk it over?" asked Mrs. Groby, laughing. "Now where's yer present? Don't be shy."

Mrs. Huncote came to the rescue in time to prevent Perce decorating the silver salver with an "H" scratched with the carvers.

"Won't you come into the garden?" she asked Mrs. Groby. "It's lovely."

"Everything in the garden's lovely," cried Perce.

The country cousins came closer; Elspeth hovered. Mrs. Groby was heard to vow that if anybody'd given her that biscuit box she'd pop it.

"Hush!" said Mrs. Huncote. "That's from Lady Belhus."

"'Oo cares?" asked Mrs. Groby, democratic and slightly drunk.

"Come with me, Mrs. Groby," said Elspeth. But Mrs. Groby turned on her. "'Oo's arskin' yer for yer opinion, Elspeth?"

There was a thrill of horror, for suddenly the Grobys grew "family like" and the guests were greeted as Flora, Lucy, anything. Mrs. Farnell and the doctor intervened, for Muriel had burst into tears as gentility expired, while Perce had to be operated on for swallowed fishbone. At last Mrs. Groby accepted tea. It was very hot, so she poured it into her saucer from

256 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

which she lapped in the intervals of huge bitings out of a lump of cake.

"That ain't good tea . . ." (lap) "I always say, take yer tea strong and labour in the vineyard of the Lord . . ." (lap, squish) . . .

Perce joined his father, who was consuming foie gras sandwiches, three at a time.

"That stuff ain't arf bad," he told the Cuthbert-Sawbones Junior group. "'Ave a bit, sonny," offering the plate to the highly brushed Peter. "Don't choke yerself, Perce. Yer enjoying yer little self, ain't yer?"

"Not arf."

"I believe yer." He pointed a thumb at the wedding cake. "Just as good as mother makes it, eh!"

Mrs. Huncote watched Mrs. Farnell's face and began uncontrollably to laugh. She felt like weeping too. But she was the leader, so she must follow her guests' desires. She broke up the Groby clot, and soon Huncote, who had missed the scene, heard his mother talking to Mrs. Groby. The conversation had begun with an interesting cancer case, and was proceeding onwards to the condition of a neighbour whose nervous "cistern" was completely wrecked. Told in a whisper to get Mr. Groby away, he managed to land him on the doctor, with a hint that he needed looking after; the doctor dosed him with more champagne. But he could not find Sue; she had gone away, it seemed, to put on her going-away dress, and so for a moment he talked to Grandpa Challow.

"I never been in London for a long time," said the old man. "No, not since the Jubilee. It's a long time since 'eighty-seven! I was so tall then surely."

"Did you see anything?" asked Huncote.

The old man was not listening, he was lost in memories: "There was the Queen, looking valiant in her carriage, and the Royal Sussex guarding her all the

way. I was just about glad to see her, such a praaper lady. But the bees all died that year," he sighed, and accepted a glass of champagne.

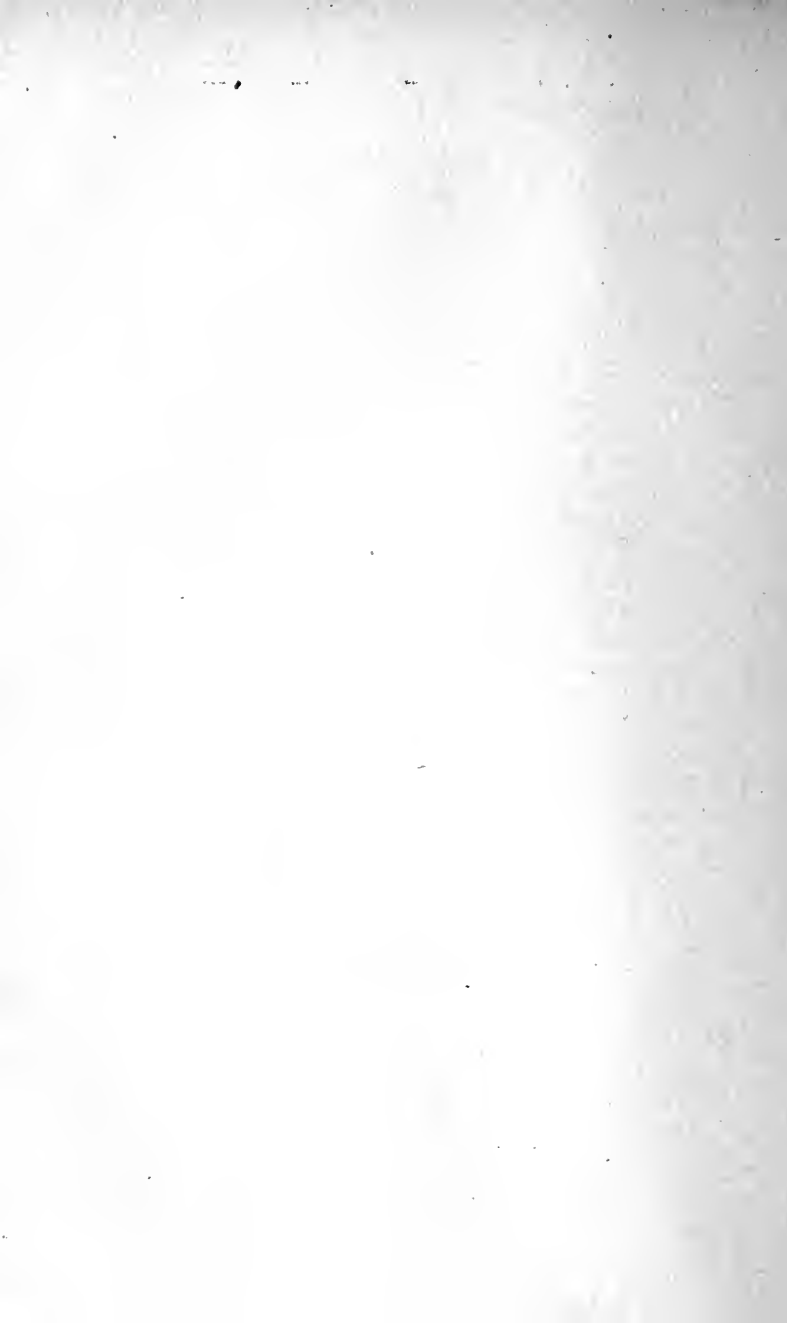
X

As they drove off Huncote glimpsed the massed classes in the portico. Another stranger was by his side, now in a pale grey travelling gown, a charming stranger who smiled and somehow was his. He took her hand. They were both of them relieved, very shy, rather frightened. He looked into the dark eyes that appealed only to him; he stooped to kiss the smiling lips and said:

"You are beautiful!"

"You story!" she replied.

He laughed; she charmed him; she alone was real. He drew down the glove to kiss the strong arm; she put her other hand upon his neck and shyly stroked his hair. In their own way they were both of them entrusting their lives to an unknown, but perhaps benevolent Providence . . .



PART THE THIRD
LEAVES OF WILLOW

A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse:
A spring shut up, a fountaine sealed.
(The Song of Solomon.)

CHAPTER THE FIRST

THE PYRENEES AND PEMBROKE SQUARE

I

ROGER HUNCOTE shifted upon his pillow, stretched himself, still half-asleep. He tried to untie his eyelids and then, feeling he was still very tired, nestled closer against Sue, as if in five days he had acquired the habits of marriage. But through the dimness which with every moment grew less, he was conscious of the life surrounding him and of the last five days, so hurried, so packed with emotion and sensation, hectic and exhausting, hectic and exquisite. As consciousness came to him he liked to remember in half-wakefulness; it was like a play for him alone performed. From St. Olaves they had gone to Dover and there they stayed the night; the next day on to Paris, where again they had broken the journey. Paris had been hateful. The city was wearing her ugly face of wet days, when water decrepitates upon the zinc roofs and floods the stone gutters, when the women in their smart half-mourning scurry like cats, and everything is brilliant with water, not dull and muddy as in London but somehow so much wetter. Paris had been dreadful; she looked like a scarecrow in a dressing-jacket of *crêpe de chine*. He remembered how wonderful Sue thought it, how bravely she had set out from the hotel right into the rain, until he stopped her and made her get into a taxi. She had not thought of a cab; it shocked him a little, that, and charmed him. And there had been an interesting moment, when he took her to the Bon Marché to buy a hat. How was he to know where

to buy women's hats? He remembered her shrinking from the saleswoman.

Lazily still, he thought of their journey to Biarritz, so long and yet so delightful because every hour grew warmer and lighter, until suddenly they saw the sun drown as a torch in the blue sea beyond the basin of Arcachon.

He looked at her. She was fragile and childish like this, with her hair in two thick black plaits. One lay across her cheek and neck, and he had to tell himself that if she opened her eyes they would be astonished and eager, so as not to think of her in her tragic darkness as a Salammbo in the embrace of her python. She lay upon her side, her face turned towards him, her dark mouth a little open, roscid lips pressed into the pillow, eyelashes at rest upon her cheek. He came closer, drawn by the strong lines of the neck, of the broad shoulders still beautiful under the shapeless swaddle of the blankets. She was delicious and she fired him, but yet she was strange where she was, and he pitied her. Sue in Biarritz! He laughed: what an exile! He sat, still looking at her, and very gently under the bedclothes found her hand. In her sleep she closed her fingers upon his. Sue in Biarritz! He remembered the excited discussion when he asked her where she wanted to spend the honeymoon and she answered:

"Just as you like; I'd thought of Ramsgate. Though," and her eyes sparkled, half-wistful, "though Ada says they'll go to Cromer when she gets married."

Mischievously he replied: "Oh, I was thinking of Japan. What d'you think, Sue?"

"Don't make game of me," said Sue, rather hurt.

The relentless mechanism of wealth had captured Sue, and Cromer was not for her. She was nearly taken to Japan, just for fun, and would have been perhaps if Huncote had been a good sailor. So she was taken to Biarritz because it would be warm. Now there was no

end to the cytherean worlds to which Sue might be translated,—first class all the way! It was terrible; probably she was dreaming of it, and it was a troublesome dream, for she moaned a little, and her hand struggled in that of her husband. Still he thought of those scenes, of her amazement mixed with fear when she heard they were to have a month off. “Little Ishmaelite!” he thought. “You’re not alone now.” And bent down to kiss her very softly upon the cheek. She was waking and, feeling him close, slowly wound about his neck a sleepy arm. He could not think, he found, when he held her so. He could only feel, and some of his emotion was æsthetic as he saw her eyelids struggle, and waited a little anxiously for that first look of morning that is surprised, shrinking, yet full of anticipation, when beauty which in the night has died is born again in a new world. He was thrilled, for the blind was up, and the room full of light. How lovely she would look in the pale lucence of the Biscayan air!

She woke. She smiled. Contentedly she settled closer in his arms. “So happy!” she murmured. As he pressed her to him, thrilled by the sweet-scented softness of her, she gave him her lips like a tired child that seeks comfort; soon,—and then it was he who was the child,—she grasped him closer with drugged intensity, all instinctive, together greedy and generous. Much later, when she let him come into the room whence she had expelled him while she dressed, while she put on her blouse, he watched the slow rise and fall of her breast, wondered whether from that soft bosom he could strike the fountain hippocrene.

II

It was all new and delightful, that first fortnight, for they went hand in hand, twin explorers, Sue to the

discovery of foreign parts, Roger to that of Sue's heart, a land more alien than he knew. They were not active at first, and it seemed enough in the intervals of meals (those semicolons of all holidays) to walk along the cliffs and watch the sea breathe, stopping sometimes to caress each other when a tree or a wall offered shelter. Often, quite unashamed, they lay together silent in the rough grass, burning their faces with sunshine and kisses. Instinctively Huncote knew that here Sue was at her best, where there was nothing that connected with the life she had known, but just sea, earth, and air, strange to the slum child and regenerating. He did not put it to himself like that, but he felt it every time they went down to the beach where Sue was shocked by the Paris bathing dresses, where she would laugh at a policeman or a chair-ticketeer, or allude to the casino porter as "old funny hat." Whenever she did that sort of thing she threw him a look of apology, as if she had broken a rule and was afraid. For Sue in those days was very much on her guard and, now and then, when rarely she was alone, she used to work out Rules of Conduct. "I must be careful. Mustn't say 'didn't order' again. I remember as Miss Theresa told me . . ."

"As" worried her, for Miss Theresa had also told her something about "as." She little knew how blessed she was in the possession of correct "h's", for when people mismanaged their "h's" she did not notice: her ear was not trained to the difference. She had learnt by faith even to powder her nose, which she thought very fast. But Theresa said: "Your nose needs powder. Powder it. Only vain women think they're pretty enough to go about with it shiny." Then she thought: "Got to be refined now and use a napkin." A moment of anxiety when she thought that some people called them "serveets"; she thought too of Sir Lucius's young lady now that she was married to Sir R., and therefore was Lady R. It was wonderful, but a little daunting, rather

like being a queen at the age of six and going through the coronation ceremony with an extra heavy crown.

But she was not unhappy; she had no time to be unhappy, for impressions rushed upon her, railway stations that did not look like railway stations as one knew them, and advertisements of unknown commodities: Quinquina Dubonnet . . . Galeries Lafayette . . . Chocolat Menier. She was rather fond of the latter, for she half-understood it; that was chocolate, anyhow, and as for Menier she concluded that was cream. Here, in Biarritz, everything was queer; the people drinking in the streets under awnings, and among them real ladies; the bank officials, dressed like officers on parade; the funny little donkeys carrying what looked like ten times their weight. Everything was funny except, perhaps, the slow oxen that came, bound in couples under the yoke, with a lovely rhythm in their swaying heads and dewlaps of velvet. The draught-oxen stirred in her something inexpressible; she stopped her husband once to look at a couple that passed. They were very large, the colour of curds and whey, and their broad bellies, a little rough, shone like mercerised cotton. Huncote understood vaguely that she liked them.

"Aren't they beautiful?" he said.

"Oo, yes," said Sue, and felt a lump in her chest because she could not explain more than that.

They left the town sometimes to go to St. Jean de Luz, that is like peach blossom upon a white wall, to San Sebastian, villas and boulevards clustering with a French air under the crag where is the bull ring, Africa's outpost, pink brick and yellow sand like a stain of blood and gold. It frightened her, all this colour, for never before had she seen much but the grey and black of London streets, and leaves that have strewn ashes over their bodies in prevision of their own death. But it was anxious too; it was truly the wedding journey with its literary accompaniments of riot; it was revelation, revo-

lution, a piece of new life suddenly forced into the old. Sue felt that never had life been so vivid, and she wondered innocently whether it would always be so, without work, without need to bother about money, without rain, without wrangles, and with love.

For she loved him, the knight who had come to her drawn by swans; she loved both him and his silver armour, and there was no fear she should lose him by asking his name: simpler than Elsa, she would have been too shy, and it was enough that he should walk with her in that silver armour.

Her husband's mood varied little; satisfied, at last, in his desire, able to live without thinking about it, he was content to be with her, to watch her move, to hear her laugh, and to let himself believe that as it was so would it ever be. He was just sensuous in those days, feeling and hearing, smelling, seeing, an animal with the intellectual faculties of man added to heighten the animal's enjoyment. But still, sometimes a little of his own self came up, and he saw. One morning Sue was not very well; she looked pale, seemed restless. At first he hesitated to enquire, out of discretion; then she confessed that she had slept ill, that she had indigestion. It gave him an awful shock; somehow one ought not to have indigestion on the honeymoon; it was not romantic. In Sue's case indigestion made her nose rather red. She did not get up early that morning, and he went out alone. He walked rather miserably along the coast, nearly all the way to the race course; it was a calamity that Sue should have indigestion; as this was the honeymoon he thought indigestion serious. Indigestion occupied all his thoughts, and he wondered why this healthy young woman should suffer from it. Then he remembered, and it gave him a shock: he had vaguely noticed Sue's behaviour at meals; her idea of *hors-d'œuvre* was four sardines, several pieces of sausage, plenty of bread and butter, some cucumber, and all the olives. She always

had potatoes with the fish, and plenty of each vegetable after the entrée. When it came to ice-cream, well, she might have been an American, and there never was much left in the fruit dish, even if it had contained half a dozen oranges and a pound of grapes. He grew quite hot as he thought of it. "She's greedy," he thought gloomily. Then still more gloomily: "She'll get fat and coarse." He had a horrible vision of his graceful love growing, well just like those white-faced French and Spanish women around him, with pendulous cheeks and downy ears and mouths. He hated her as in his mind he destroyed her beauty. But almost at once that other intellectual self, which ten days had swathed in sensuous veils, remarked to him:

"Wait, you don't understand! Don't you know why she eats so much? Don't you know that all her life perhaps she has never had quite enough to eat?"

It was pathetic, but it was terrible too; it was like discovering an unclean past.

III

And yet he loved her. They went out one evening, past St. Andrew's Church, and on up the cliff. As they went they talked desultorily, Sue of a girl she knew who had been given a fox terrier as a birthday present. Did she like dogs? Terriers? Yes, rather. She didn't hold with lap dogs. They discussed the temperaments of Scotch and Irish terriers.

"Awful fighters," said Sue.

The talk wandered on to the butcher's fierce bull terrier in Northbourne Road. Still they climbed the cliff. At the top they had discarded dogs and had got to cats.

"Don't like cats," said Sue, "nasty deceitful things! You never know what they're up to."

Little by little, the conversation dwindled in the night of fire and black opal that was about them, proper frame

for their passion. He had laid an arm about her shoulders that felt warm under the thin wrap, and she said nothing, just stood by his side, looking out over the murmuring sea. The moon lay low upon the horizon, like a pan of flame. Huncote thought of the eye of Cyclops set in a blue brow. A thin film of gauzy cloud swathed a half of the moon, like a yashmak.

Huncote said:

"Isn't she beautiful like that? Look how she blushes. Is that because I have kissed you, and it makes her shy? Perhaps her man's gone out of town."

She laughed and nestled closer. "Don't you think she's beautiful?" he persevered, determined to tear from her some appreciation, "like that, like a big round flame?"

"When she's red like that," Sue murmured, "it means rain."

He felt offended and repelled; he almost drew his arm away, but as she spoke she had come closer to him as if telling him:

"I can't tell you how beautiful she is because I can't talk, that is because I can't think; but I can feel."

He saw something of that in the eyes that seemed so large and dark in the white face, faintly lit.

"Kiss me," she said.

It was the first time she had said that, and as he bent down to caress her, all afire with the discovery of his love, there was no room for intellectual difference. He held her: it was just she and he. He kissed her and it was they.

IV

It was a blue, mysterious night, pale and fugitive, hung with little golden stars, the southern night made for white courts and the romantic rides of Don Quixote, a night like blue silk flecked with gems. And yet, as if

the world hated darkness, a faint light promised day and the thunderous sun; the night already seemed melting in the dawn, like a nymph surprised, leaving behind her a trail of rose and mauve, sweet heralds of a fiercer air. In the smoking-room two men talked.

"Queer couple," said one voice. It was a clear, well-bred voice, that of the highly brushed man, with the cropped moustache, soldier probably, who at dinner sat two tables away from the Huncotes with the woman who looked like a duster and was, therefore, probably an Anglo-Indian. "Of course, it's quite obvious," the voice went on. "Usual sort of thing, you know."

"Oh," said the other voice, "I hardly think it can be what you say — they're so quiet."

"What's his name? Huneker?"

"Something like that. Huneker or Hinker, I think."

"Well, one can't be sure," said the well-brushed man, "but — you only have to look at them. He's all right, but she — oh, you know the sort. Mind you, they're very decent girls," he added hurriedly. "May be her first bust for all we know. I remember a pal of mine ran a little girl like that for quite a year. I forget where he picked her up, in one of the big shops, I think."

"She's wearing a wedding ring."

"Oh, wedding rings!" said the highly brushed man. "Surely that's nothing. The jeweller doesn't ask you for your marriage lines, does he?"

They laughed together. The man who looked like a company director said: "Somebody'll cut him out."

In a nudging tone the highly brushed man replied:

"Not yet, in a year or two. They all go that way."

Officially they were Mr. and Mrs. Huncote. Many of the guests agreed with the speakers; others trusted the wedding ring; scepticism prevailed most among the women, especially among those who thought Huncote too

good for Sue. Being discussed, they also became celebrated. Huncote was already morbidly self-conscious, so he soon understood from the turnings of heads when people talked on the terrace, from covert looks flung at them over newspapers, and from eyes which until he came in were fixed upon golf clubs, that they were being watched. Either they were disapproved of, or they were curiosities. Don Quixote may love the peasant Dulcinea, but Oxford may not mate with the washhouse. Three days later, a large schoolboy, clad in a blazer so violent that he evidently belonged to a school founded by Cedric the Saxon, whispered to his sister as he passed: "That's 'im!" In the afternoon the Huncotes moved to St. Jean de Luz.

They were happier at St. Jean de Luz, and Sue lived in her dream; Huncote recovered, for they did not go to the Continental but to a smaller hotel, where they were the only English guests, and much admired of the French and Spaniards. Sue bloomed as if marriage had brought to her a fuller life. Watched, she ate less and, besides, already her appetite was waning as she paid in satiation the price of wealth. She looked charming, for Theresa had done her work well; she wore white linen skirts with lingerie blouses, white patent leather belt with red enamel buckles that went well with her dark hair. In the evening she was like a moth in flimsy, half-evening frocks of *crêpe de chine* or *chiffon*. They were very wonderful to her, those frocks, and when she was alone she liked to lay them out on the bed and stroke them: before doing that she always washed her hands, for she could not yet realise that in her new station her hands would generally be clean. The frocks worried her a little, even though they were not very low-cut, for she was modest, and before she married had never exposed anything of her person above the elbow; in those modest evening clothes which Theresa had tactfully chosen, so free from audacity, Sue felt dreadfully

naked. But she liked it too; it felt fast, exciting; there was something night-clubbish about it, it was just like Ada Nuttall. Sometimes she wished that Miss Theresa, she meant Theresa, had let her have an extra quarter size in shoes. There was only one blot,—her best lace blouse. When Theresa bought the trousseau she found that Sue had only three chemises, six handkerchiefs, and two pairs of combinations. Sue explained that one did not need to have many things when one could always wash them; she was rather horror-stricken, brought nearer to the idea of bankruptcy, when she had to thread ribbons through several dozens of garments, and to learn the use of petticoat bodices of lace and lawn. When all her older clothes were shed and she sat isolated from her world by those mysterious things which she had seen on no one except on the acrobatic wax figure in Regent Street, she felt born anew, rather august; she understood “the holy calm of feeling perfectly dressed.” But, Theresa’s eyes relaxing for a moment, Mrs. Groby quietly slipped into the trunk Sue’s Sunday lace blouse: “It’ll come in ’andy in the evenin’ when them swells dress, as they say,” she remarked to her daughter. “An’ it’s a shame to waste it. Besides, w’en it gets wore out, yer can wear it when there’s nobody about but yer ’usband.”

She said nothing; dimly she wanted to wear her nice things when her husband was about; her matrimonial education was not yet begun; but it was a lovely blouse, a rich blouse, the sort of blouse one wanted to wear with a velvet skirt. She wore it at St. Jean de Luz quite suddenly, with a skirt of white drill. She also wore one or two pendants: the blouse deserved them. Nothing happened. Huncote did not realise that there was something wrong with the blouse, for he was pure, and the wages of virtue is blindness. But he was disturbed; he disliked something in Sue’s get-up. And she was disappointed that he did not comment upon the blouse.

He ought to have; there were quite two and a half yards of insertion let into it; she knew for she had measured them. She reflected that dress was not understood of men, which was the beginning of matrimonial education, that is to say of matrimonial error.

They were happy in those days, letting life pass smoothly, much together, talking a great deal, frequently interrupting by caresses commonplace conversations. But these were not commonplace; they were thrilling because intimate. Huncote heard about the aristocracy of Sue's family, the aunt who was a cook in North Audley Street at forty pounds a year and unfortunately kept herself to herself; about the distant cousin who was a music teacher and earned three pounds a week, "and you may not believe it but she plays after dinner at the big hotels and has her name in the Sunday paper." Also he laid bare the deeper roots of the indigestion: the budget of the Groby family. Stonemasonry was a good trade, but out of Mr. Groby's thirty-eight shillings a week, ten shillings went in rent; there were eight shillings for Mr. Groby's fares, beer, tobacco, newspapers, hospitality, trade-union and clubs. The Insurance Act being mentioned he defended it but was completely routed by the expert.

"What d'you want an act for?" asked Sue. "We only pay more than we used to to the Hearts of Oak. And you've got to go on with the Burial Club, let alone the unemployed insurance."

He tried to clear up the muddle by working out the total per week, but Sue knew so infinitely more about the cost of funerals and the actual price charged by the slum doctor for his advice and a bottle of red, about the cost of getting to the hospitals and the time you had to wait there, that he had to give in. He had to take her facts as she gave them to him, from the source, and to try and understand how the five of them lived on the remaining twenty shillings a week.

"Potatoes," said Sue, with an air of general lucidity. It was heart-breaking and yet wonderful. It was good to be Cophetua and raise up such an exquisite beggar maid. He loved her all the more for having been poor, for now he stood between her and poverty; he was helping, he was protecting, and so he could love.

One by one, the autumn days of the South that are such as summer languidly passed away. It seemed difficult to remember the old urgencies of London, the smells of smoke and malt from the brewery behind the High Street, and the trams that thundered past. Here all was order and beauty, luxury, calm, and delight.

On the night before they left for Paris, among his letters was one for Sue in Flora's handwriting, but there were also two picture postcards from Perce. He read them, for they fascinated him:

"Had an exciting time this evening. You bet we dined well, eh, what? I'm writing this because Ma's tight, though she doesn't know it. Good night, old peach blossom! Perce."

This postcard embodied the broader humours of the evening. Divided into two pictures, it showed the bachelor, his feet on the overmantel, smoking a big cigar with the band on, in the midst of many bottles, mostly empty, while he read a paper, bearing the words: "All the Winners." The other half represented the married man, in a frayed dressing-gown, managing by some miracle to carry triplets and a feeding bottle while in the background a large and angry wife hovered with a poker.

He turned the thing over in his hand, then looked at the other. This one was sentimental, represented a couple bowered in roses, she with her hair just out of curlers, and he very pink-cheeked, like a young German barber aware that he was being photographed. It bore this little poem:

HOPE

At the stile I stand a' dreaming
Of the day we joined our hands,
And a future I am weaving
For you and me in distant lands.

He stood staring at them for a long time, feeling all dull and unable to think of what he should do. There was nothing to do, he thought, except to wait. When Sue saw the cards she laughed. She seemed quite unconscious of offence. She even showed him the picture of London comedy, inviting him to laugh too, especially at the triplets. It was curious: modest to the point of prudery in all that concerned the relations of the sexes, she seemed quite careless of results which popular taste had taught her to regard as humorous. But, finding him cold, she suddenly grew embarrassed and tried to stuff the cards away into an absent apron pocket. Finding no pocket, she grew scared and stood crumpling the cards in excited little hands. Then, shamefacedly, with visions of Sir Lucius's young lady passing through her unhappy mind, she murmured: "I s'pose they've been having a bit of a sing-song."

V

It was just after lunch. She had been married two months. She felt more comfortable just now, for at last Rhoda had gone down-stairs, had ceased to keep an eye on her while she ate, an uncomfortable expert eye considering one still had to think out which knife when it came to fish. Not that Rhoda had ever adopted a judicial attitude: she was too well-trained for that. If Rhoda had been told to serve up lunch in a trough her blue eyes would have remained unemotional, and she would either have said, "Yes, mum," or given notice on

the spot; in neither case would an opinion have been mirrored in the blue crystal of those eyes.

Sue was alone and looked with a content in which was still a little awe, at her dining room. Huncote at Oxford had never belonged to the æsthetic push, the push that plays Vincent d'Indy and wears chocolate coloured cloaks; so his ideas of furnishing were not those of the Russian ballet; he was in the old furniture stage, seven years late. Sue sat at a gate-leg table, a little awkward, for she had not yet found out whether one should put both knees outside, or both knees inside, or one inside and one outside the double leg. As in those days, by Theresa's orders, she wore a tight, almost hobble skirt, she vividly realised some of the bars of the gilded cage.

She looked round, and again she was a little awed by the tablecloth with its glistening, flying birds, the rather colourless but evidently refined imitation Lowestoft crockery, the pale green vase full of amber chrysanthemums. She looked angrily at the chrysanthemums: why, when she did them herself, did the cluster look pot-bellied like a publican, while Rhoda alone had the art of giving their long stalks languor and grace? It all looked very queer, the panelled walls and the cold white of the distemper, the Jacobean dresser with its willow-pattern plates, and the toby jugs on the top, which Sue thought quaint. One by one, she again surveyed every article of furniture, ladder-back chairs, hanging electric lamp in beaten black iron, rather severe, queer curtains with sprawling birds, and red and blue carpet much too good to tread on. She walked about the room rather aimlessly; she had nothing to do and wished she was like Ada Nuttall, a rip, and could smoke cigarettes. But cigarettes made her rather ill, especially after coffee: she longed for a cup of tea.

But still it was very wonderful and new. She went out into the hall, the little green and white hall with prints of ugly theologians which she knew must be good

because obviously the frames cost such a lot. How beautiful the short, firm Axminster pile felt. Of course it would never do to have a dog; vaguely she wished there was a dog, something to make a noise. For there was no noise down-stairs where Rhoda and Ethel were refinedly having their dinner. On the drawing-room landing she paused, made as if to go in, then changed her mind. Instead she went up to the next floor, where was her bedroom and that of her husband. Chaste and regular was her bedroom with its Chippendale suite, its big white cupboard set in the corner, the tall mirror let into the wall, and the many switches leading to lights in apparently unnecessary places. There were very few pictures, just some colour prints, and over the mantelpiece a row of prints of little girls, called "London Cries"; Sue thought they looked rather silly kids. Indeed in the whole room, where she now stood rather worshipping, there was nothing personal in half curtain, lace toilet cover or silver brush. It was wonderful; it felt like the day she had been to the Loan Exhibition of pictures at the St. Panwich town hall; it made her respectful. She was living among the sort of things which normally one saw only in the shop windows. She was still a little dazed, though she had slept in this room for a month; it had complexities she did not quite understand, a mischievous double switch especially, which always seemed to turn on the light near the bed when she wanted it over the dressing table. Only one thing seemed real: between the windows a large steel engraving of "Wedded." Roger did not at all like "Wedded"; but Sue had bought it out of a money present he insisted upon giving her at the end of the engagement, and what could he do? What could he do, especially when she flung herself back into his arms in the attitude of the Roman's bride and said: "It's just like you and me!"

For a long time Sue remained staring at the picture:

yes, that was art. (She had been hearing a little about art lately.) It was more than art, it was different from everything else in the room: all these things, Sue admired, but she had never thought of possessing them; the picture, yes, that had been a dream, but attainable, and she had attained it while the other things represented a foreign life. Still, she had nothing to do. She remembered Flora had said something about lying down after dinner — lunch, she meant. But then Sue had always had something to do at that time, and she could not get used to lying down. She went into Roger's room, next to hers, rather nervously. It frightened her, this place so definitely masculine, for it had never entered her mind that a married couple might have two rooms, or even two beds. The arrangement had never been discussed, for Huncote had no principles in those things; after taking the house he found it so awkwardly planned that the front room was not much larger than the back one. Two beds would have crowded it, and so Flora, half to help and half to shock, induced her brother to have his own room. "It's queer!" thought Sue. It was a little bleak to her as well as queer, and even worse. She had assumed that marriage was a peculiar and continuous intimacy: two rooms inevitably made that intimacy spasmodic and purposeful. For Sue was modest; she was one of those who think that nothing matters if it seems unintentional. She loved him, she had a silent, brooding sensuousness, she had led him to the land of new delights without herself knowing the way. But still she could not bear that the truth should be true. Separation, except in moments, forced her to realise the definiteness of desire. That separation made of her room the temple of Aphrodite. She hated that, it seemed immodest. It frightened her, it tied her tongue, and her husband did not understand. When every evening he came before going to bed, even when he merely sat down upon her bed, took her hand and talked of quite

insignificant things, she felt herself grow quite small and contracted because, though he was her husband, he was within her privacy, and it shocked her that even he should intrude upon this privacy.

Sue did not want to have any privacy at all: it was not normal that privacy should outlive marriage. And sometimes she would throw her arms about him, drag him down to her and kiss him, hiding her eyes against him. He thought she loved him then and was glad; he did not understand that she wanted to hide her eyes so that she might not see her attitude as equivocal.

Slowly she went down-stairs. Somehow it was all too much. She had not had time to dream during the short engagement. In the days of Bert she sometimes thought they would take two rooms in the Dwellings or somewhere else. After the coming of Huncote, her mother gave her thoughts precision. Mrs. Groby talked with breezy carelessness of Sue having a house of her own. That had been terrifying and then, little by little, the house formulated itself: a villa in Lamoro Avenue, Highgate, one of the nice little houses with a yellow gravel front garden, and a green dot of grass in the middle. She showed the little house to Huncote, who laughed and said it would be too small. Mrs. Groby helped her then, and very slowly another dream formed, also in Highgate, a big double-fronted house, with a drive and something vague and impressive called grounds. The Groby family found it very difficult to get beyond Highgate, because in those fields Sue sometimes took short walks with Bert when he came out of the workshop. And they had the instinct of their class to live as close as possible to each other.

But that did not avail. Even Ada Nuttall's suggestion, who wanted for Sue a smart cottage in the country, Finchley way, with a garage for the car (generous gesture), a cottage which might be called Kosikot, was not accepted of Flora. What Flora really wanted was a

flat, but Huncote's tendency was to shut himself off with his love, also to have his own house, hearth, castle. And so it became Pembroke Square, because Flora was quite determined that as she had not stayed in Clare Street she was this time going to stay somewhere. Sue accepted: she accepted everything but considered the rent which, so far as she could work out, was almost Mr. Groby's wages for a year, a lot for a house so poky and tumble-down.

Just outside the drawing-room she stopped again. She looked in at the pretty room, with its white and blue paper, its rather staring chintzes, the mahogany furniture and the prints. There was a fire shining brightly. She hesitated. Upon the little *vernis martin* table lay *Punch* and *The Morning Post*. Still she hesitated, hardly knowing why, and then decided that she could not go in. She was not, she felt dimly, yet able to sit in the drawing-room after dinner,—lunch, she meant.

Quickly she dressed; she could not find the pair of shoes she wanted, and this annoyed her; Rhoda must have taken them away. Then, as it did not occur to her to ring the bell, she put on another pair. She looked charming in a blue coat and skirt, the coat rather short, and lapels of flowered silk that looked very small and insignificant, she thought. That skirt *was* tight, but then she had asked Ada Nuttall, who laughed at her. She drew on her white gloves carefully and wished they were not so long, for she did not quite know what to do with the part that went up to the elbow. She wore a rather large hat that threw darkness into the shadows under her eyes. As she stood, her neck swathed in her husband's present, a stole, only stone marten, but yet incredibly rich, two strips of white leather indicating the hands in the muff, she looked mature, and there was a little smile of pleasure upon her lips. She was going out to look at the shops, wonder what she would like to buy, and whether she would have the courage to buy it

after all. She did not quite like herself in these browns and blues; the black hat, with its Chinese trimming of blue and gold, disappointed her; she would have liked a touch of real colour, but Flora and Theresa were so interfering. Very carefully she went down-stairs and silently out; Rhoda had not seen her go.

She breathed more freely in the crisp air. The traffic of the gay December day, sunny somehow and brisk, pleased and cheered her. She liked everything,—the motorbusses, the hurry of the people. And yet at the same time she felt that what she left behind somehow she took with her too. She felt established and house-conscious; she could not get away from the preoccupation of the established that was hers and yet ran itself without her. She was responsible and not in charge; or in charge and not responsible.

She sighed, and then she found that instead of turning to the right she had turned to the left. She did not know the district well, and only the dowdiness of the shops told her she was making for Hammersmith instead of for Kensington. Already she was beginning to detect differences in shops. But it was all very wonderful, and for a full hour she went on to the Broadway, on to King Street, to gaze at bananas, and chairs, and handkerchiefs at three-three. It felt more real here than further east; she knew that much. She saw people like the St. Panwich people; she had heard voices like theirs before. It was not so different here. She had not done any ordinary shopping for so long; she had been only to dress-makers, and milliners, and decorators, where everybody spoke so nicely, just like ladies and gentlemen. On an impulse she went into a little stationer's and bought a familiar penny packet of stationery which she did not want. The woman called her "Ma'm", and somehow that was not what she wanted. She wondered why oppression was suddenly come upon her. Why should it with the friendly trams roaring past? With the crowd

swirling on and off the pavement, just like the High Street, and even the butcher shouting farther on? Perhaps it was that already, at half-past three, the December sun was waning, and a grey rawness falling. Sue did not know. She did not want to go anywhere, or to go home, or to stay; she felt plucked out, as if she were having a bath in the middle of the Albert Hall with a full house staring at her. She walked along slowly, hardly noticing that she was being jostled.

She went a long way into the west, noticing less now the things about her and thinking rather dimly of ideas rather than of facts. She was not used to that, and it was difficult. She thought of herself the night before at the theatre, of the commissionaires, of the programme girls who spoke so nicely, and looked so nice, just like the ladies in the dress circle. "Of course," thought Sue, "they aren't real ladies; they wouldn't be working if they were." It had been difficult, for she did not quite know how to treat them when they spoke to her to show her her seat or something. She did not really feel superior, for some of them were quite as good as Ada Nuttall. Still, and she was gloomy over the idea of separation rather than proud, she supposed it was different for her, Mrs. Roger Huncote. One was a lady when one had seven hundred a year. It *did* sound a lot. But the idea of wealth did not cheer her; it was too much: "Seven hundred a year," she thought, "what's that a week, I wonder?" She could not do it. She had as much difficulty in conceiving seven hundred a year as one of another class would have had in conceiving a million a year; five pounds a week would have seemed much more opulent to her. "Besides," she thought, "it's all so funny." That was how she put it to herself, but what she meant was that all this wealth seemed fictitious, that one did not seem to see money, only bits of paper like cheques and account books with big figures marked on them, and only a little cash now and then.

It was not like the princely Fridays when Mr. Groby stacked thirty-eight shillings in silver in a tall pile upon the table, sometimes more, if he had worked over-time. That was real, while her present wealth felt like fairy gold and might, if you looked at it in the morning, turn out to be only leaves.

Sue was at the meeting place of two classes, different as sea and river, restless in alliance like the waters that break upon the bar. In a play of unguessed strangenesses she had stumbled while in a state of somnambulism into a new world: she awoke and was lost. She had burnt all her old gods and did not yet know how to worship at the new shrine; in the new world she found a strange people that ate differently, spoke and dressed differently, who spent incomprehensible sums, it seemed, for nothing, who had endless clothes for occasions that she could not understand, mysterious games, golf, hunting; liveries for the seaside, for the country; people who found pleasure at places where nothing much seemed to happen, like Ranelagh and Prince's Skating Club, who seemed quite satisfied to take tea and look at one another and smile; they were strange people indeed, with their voices placed rather high in their heads, and their wonderful way of switching off when it looked as if they were going to say something they really meant. Sue was the product of a cruder, a bloodier civilisation with its emotions more on the surface, and now she was leaping into the conflict of class instead of following the gentle gradient from Paradise Row to Highbury, to Hampstead, to South Kensington, to Knightsbridge, and then to Mayfair. Sue was, in the admirable phrase of Michael O'Connor, taking the plunge at a gulp.

She stopped; she was a little tired and did not quite know where she was, for she had lost the trams round the corner. This was near Ravenscourt Park; she felt alone and cold and wondered where she could get some tea. And thought of something else as if nothing

quieted her. Then she found she was staring at the poster of the local music hall.

BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT
AND AT ENORMOUS COST THE MANAGEMENT
HAVE THE PLEASURE AND THE OPPORTUNITY
OF PRESENTING
THE MAN OF MYSTERY
DE BERE

WITH NEW, COSTLY AND GORGEOUS SCENERY IN A GREATLY
ENLARGED AND ELABORATE ENTERTAINMENT. A PERFORMANCE
FULL OF EXCITEMENT, WONDER, AND EDUCATIONAL INTEREST.

Sue felt that she would like to go. Educational interest especially struck her; she did so want to improve her mind. But gloom settled upon her, for she told herself that in her new station this was no longer right: music halls were not refined. Yet for some time she stayed, staring at the poster, rather like a little slum child in front of a sweet-shop when it has not got a penny.

At last she turned to go home and wondered where to find a tram. As she stood on the kerb, rather aimlessly, a crawling taxi came towards her, dawdling a little more when the driver saw this well-dressed young woman. He looked at her enquiringly, but she did not respond; she was still wondering where to find the trams, and it did not occur to her to take a taxi.

VI

Mrs. Huncote and Flora came to tea. In a way this was tea experimental, for Sue was alone. During the first month very few people had called upon the young couple; when they unexpectedly did so Mrs. Huncote, Junior, was prudently not at home; on other occasions Roger was there, and Flora had flitted in in the afternoon; the real At Home which, to satisfy the Huncotian

tradition ought to be given, had not yet taken place. Nothing had been said, but Huncote unconsciously, and his relatives deliberately, rather cut off the young bride from the social fold, hoping that by and by it would be all right. This afternoon Sue was not making a social début, but having a sort of trial run. It began very well, for the weather was bad and, therefore, topical; also Sue had for the first time seen Sir Herbert Tree and felt so sorry for Caliban "stuck upon a bit of rock all alone" that her old allegiance to Mr. Lewis Waller needed rediscussing. Mrs. Huncote did not talk much but watched her daughter-in-law; she liked her that afternoon; she admired her taffeta frock, with a hint of panniers. She rather wished that her stockings were not so vividly blue, but still, on the whole. . . . And Mrs. Huncote thought: "It's clever, somehow; the girl must have some taste after all." She wondered how far Miss Underwood was responsible. But Flora had other concerns.

"You know, Sue, hair's getting much flatter; you ought to keep yours down a bit."

"D'you think I ought?" said Sue seriously.

"Well, yes, pads are quite out, you know."

"I never wore a pad in my life," said Sue.

"No, I know," said Flora, "it's only your hair that's so thick. Wish mine was; I'm going to cut it off short and have a fringe."

"Flora!" cried Mrs. Huncote. "How can you talk such nonsense?"

"I am. Everybody's doing it in Paris."

"Well, they're not doing it in St. Olaves."

"They will," said Flora, "when I do."

Mrs. Huncote laughed. "Yes, I can see the Belhus girls cutting their hair short like French artists' models!"

Sue was interested. "Do they really?" she said. "I shouldn't like to cut my hair short."

"Oh, do," said Flora mischievously, "it'll look so rapid."

"Rapid?" asked Sue blankly.

"Fast," said Flora.

"Don't listen to her," said Mrs. Huncote, "she doesn't mean it."

She need have had no fear, for Sue blushed. "Fast! How could Flora be so horrid!" The very idea made her unable to think of anything; she was glad when the tea came, though she had to struggle with it a good deal, to remember to use the sugar tongs and not to forget to let people choose between milk and cream. And that dreadful Rhoda brought up some sliced lemon just because she had once been in the household of Princess Saragamovsky. All through tea this sliced lemon haunted Sue: what did one do with sliced lemon? (She ate some of it when they were all gone, and liked it.)

The talk went around theatres and dress, easy enough then; Mrs. Huncote helped a lot, for she was going to the Riviera for a while with Elspeth. Flora was not envious, as this would enable her to stay in London.

"You must ask Roger to bring you over before we leave," said Mrs. Huncote kindly; "you'll like it, it's so pretty,—all pink and blue."

"I know," said Sue, and thought of the Pyrenees. "It's lovely. I used to look at the pictures, you know,—the big pictures outside Charing Cross,—and wonder what it was like."

"Charing Cross?" said Mrs. Huncote, puzzled.

"The railway advertisements, Mother," said Flora.

"Yes," said Mrs. Huncote. "And was it as fine as the railway advertisements, Sue?"

"Oo, yes," said Sue, "it . . ." Then she hesitated. It all looked lovely on the railway advertisements and yet—somehow . . . So she said: "I d'no," and went on struggling with the difference between the bit of blue sea when one was not quite comfortable as to one's

behaviour, and the easier joy of a railway advertisement which one could look at with Ada Nuttall, while one nudged the other if young men stared, and sucked peppermints.

They talked of pictures at the galleries too, and Sue did what she could. Mrs. Huncote had a lot to say of Lady Montacute. This reduced Sue to partial stupor; the idea that she might one day meet Lady Montacute was too terrifying. Did one kneel? Or was that only for the Queen?

At last they went away.

Mrs. Huncote said: "D'you know, she isn't bad. She may shape into something, if we don't hurry her. At any rate she knows how to keep her mouth shut, and when she opens it her teeth are rather pretty."

"I think she's a peach," said Flora, feeling very daring and American.

"I wish you wouldn't use slang," said Mrs. Huncote.

Sue felt much better. After all, it had gone off quite well; it was only her relations, but still they were very new relations, and she felt that she had done well; she was much relieved. Only she was rather hungry, for she was not used to a light lunch and this elementary tea. She had never eaten much meat, but she was accustomed to a filling, indigestible meal, mainly made up of potatoes and bread, about one o'clock. As Rhoda's idea of a lunch was something like an anchovy, a one-egg omelette, and a cutlet as large as a half-crown, Sue wanted a real tea, not a tea made up of bread and butter that you had to double before you could hold it. She thought of had-docks, and sighed.

"Well," asked Roger, in the evening, "how did it go off?"

"Oh, it was all right," she said.

"Any news?"

She looked at him blankly. What news could there be? He asked what Flora had said; she tried to tell

him, but he was not very interested in her hair troubles, and when once more she returned to the Tree v. Waller controversy he was not interested either; he seemed to have heard enough of it. He seemed, especially, to want to know how Sue liked his mother and sister, for he knew how necessary it was that she should like them.

"Oo, I do like 'em," said Sue. "They always seem to know — well, they always do right, don't they?"

He laughed. "I don't know, but I think I know what you mean. Of course anybody'd like Flora."

"I did at once," said Sue, "though I'm not one for taking fancies."

"Sue," he asked after a while, thoughtfully shaking the ash from a cigarette, "what about your old friends? The girls you used to know? Why don't you ask them along?" He did not know why he said this; he wished nothing better than to be rid of all her old friends, including her family if that were possible.

"Well," said Sue, "I didn't know whether you'd like it."

"Don't be silly," he said, taking her hand and stroking it. "Do try and understand you're quite free. I s'pose you don't understand that, do you?"

"Don't see what you mean," said Sue.

"I mean, you can do what you like. Be a little careful." He felt acutely uncomfortable. "There's been a change, of course. But still anybody you used to like, ask them to see the house. I don't want to keep you away from everybody, your girl friends or even the men you used to know."

"Roger!" said Sue, rather shocked, "I couldn't know any men, not now."

He was relieved. He laughed and drew her a little closer. "You baby," he said, "I've not bought you!"

He kissed her cheek, and she did not seem to notice; she was thinking.

"You know," she said, "it feels awfully funny. If I'd married somebody else, a man like —" She thought of Bert and altered it to "like those I used to know, I couldn't go about with anybody else."

"No," said Huncote, "I know; married and done for; you undertake to give each other for life all the society you need, and if any society comes along you happen to want, you've jolly well got to do without it. That's it, Sue, isn't it?"

"I shouldn't have put it like that," said Sue grudgingly. "It's all right when you aren't married; then you can be friends."

Once more they discussed the curious, nominally sexless and deeply sensual associations between young men and women, extending over years, always on the edge of mutual conquest, seldom triumphant, often dead before realisation, always robbed of mystery and delight when long-baulked attraction comes to a tardy blooming. Sue did not understand; she was so ready to assume that love has nothing to do with the body, so ready that she never thought about it; and yet she found so little to give it save the body. She made her husband curious in those moods, and he questioned her.

"Oh, well," she said, "it's easy enough to go wrong, especially down St. Panwich way." She grew coy and half-proud. "I remember, I was only fifteen then; a fellow came up to me in the High Street, and he said: 'Come along with me to-night; we'll go to the Heath and have some fun.'"

Huncote interrupted. "What did you say?"

"I said, 'No fair.'"

He laughed; it amused him to find her so virginally fierce, capable through her innocence of protecting herself where a more wily one would have fallen. He tried to learn more of this world where adventure sounded so much more sudden and more violent than in his own, but she had grown self-conscious. These topics gone

they found nothing else to say; he smoked and she sat there, gently kicking the little *vernis martin* table. They both grew aware that they had nothing to say, and that was awkward. But their marriage was young, and so he kissed her; so held, though so different, they felt that they were of the same essence.

Much later in the evening, before they went to bed, some of the thoughts that occupied her were spoken at last. Sue was bothered because she had no money and very reluctantly asked for some:

"But I don't understand," said Roger, "you've got your cheque book."

"Yes," said Sue.

"Well, draw a cheque!"

She looked at him with sad, dark eyes; she had often looked at that cheque book with the blank figure, £....., that might mean anything; but what she ought to do she did not know. He understood suddenly.

"Sue, you've never written a cheque, have you?"

"No," said Sue helplessly.

"I'll show you."

They spoilt two cheques, making out one to the gas company for a hundred millions.

"And would they really give me a hundred millions," asked Sue, "for that?"

He kissed her again; he loved her for being stupid. Little by little Sue grew bolder, she made a cheque out to him; she felt very proud because it contained pounds, shillings, and pence. It was an exciting exercise, it was like making money; the blank cheque looked impressive, but the cheque filled in was a sort of thunderclap; just before she signed she felt the sort of hush come over her which forms in a music hall when the man on the trapeze is going to do his great trick and the orchestra stops. Huncote, not having anything else to say, asked her what she wanted the money for; she told him diffi-

dently that she wanted to send something to an old friend of her mother's, a charwoman who — well, she'd been in trouble, but she had such a hard life. It took a little time to explain that "in trouble" was the tender way of the poor of saying "in prison."

He tried to understand how Sue's rigid morality could allow her to help the woman. He failed. He could not grasp the anarchism of the poor, united only against the law, conscious that they too may one day suffer at its hands, pitiful before they are censorious.

"She didn't oughter do things like that," said Sue, "but she does, and there you are."

The quietist morality amused him. "And anyhow," Sue added, "she does have such a hard life."

As he held her then he was all moved and melted by the sweetness of her, her easy acceptance of things as they were, her easy charity, her easy belief in what was told her, her entire lack of ideas, qualifications, theories, her realisation of duty as a tradition, her ignorance of restraints other than a vague conscience and the police. He felt too civilised, and it was horrible already to feel different, to begin to wonder whether they would ever cease to be different, they two. It frightened him, so he held her closer, kissed her more violently, half because he loved her, and half because he sought to persuade himself that by holding her closely he might make himself hers. It was passionate and horrible to embrace a doubt.

Sue went to the bank next day, bent upon a bagful of gold, but when she got there the young man was very superior, and clearly knew what she really was. Her courage failed her. She wanted to leave the bank, but she was much too afraid; that would have been like going into a shop and buying nothing. So with very hot ears she passed through the grating an exceedingly ill-written cheque, made out to Mrs. Roger Huncote, for five shillings. She was for many months to have plenty

of trouble with cheques. By and by, as her cheques grew larger with her experience, eyebrows were no longer raised at her, but one day she drew a cheque for ten pounds, and when the young man, now grown polite, said: "How will you have it?" she said: "I'll have it now." The staff of the bank behaved disgracefully to her that day.

VII

He loved her, stumbling on like this through the mysteries of another class. He loved her hesitations, always due to the fear of offending, her anxiety not only to behave like a real lady, but still to be what she really was, Sue Groby, much more than Susan Huncote, always tender, always ready to help, and never conscious that she was doing so. Her family were established, for though Mr. Groby continued in the stone-masonry, a pound a week came to the Grobys; Perce now went to the City, and Muriel was passing on to a Young Ladies' Academy. She had begun the piano and, faithless one, found nothing but vulgarity in the mouth-organ of Romeo.

Huncote learnt how much already Sue mattered to him when, for three days, he had to go to Manchester to decide whether some small cottages his mother owned near Guide Bridge should be pulled down and rebuilt. She wrote to him every day long letters in a childish round handwriting, unpunctuated letters with indiscriminate "darlings" scattered in them, and "tons of kisses" at the end, and crosses which he understood; they thrilled him nearly as much as her caresses. Only one thing puzzled him: an inscription on the outside of the envelope every morning: S.W.A.K.

When he came back he asked her:

"Sue, why d'you put S.W.A.K. outside my letters? What does it mean?"

She laughed and blushed. "It means, sealed with a kiss, you silly!"

CHAPTER THE SECOND

HESITATION

I

ROGER HUNCOTE was not happy. He was not unhappy. He was tasting the ordinary stuff of life. And, half-consciously, he felt it should not be so, as if three months after marriage fate were not affording him the poetic justice of illusion unmixed. He had still to grow up and learn the art of life: to know how to do without happiness. Against all probability his adventure was not yet a failure; the charm of simplicity, of devotion, of childish sensuality still clung about Sue; he was still given that which is most delicious to the male, admiration and adoration, until he learns that a more delicious thing is to find the one to whom he can give this admiration and adoration. But already a faint psychological difference existed between their attitudes, for Roger was happiest when away from Sue and he could think of her, while Sue was happiest when he was present, when he could with a smile unite with her in a sort of eucharist. For she to him was the dream, and he to her was the fact, so, together or apart, always one of them missed what he or she desired. He was not dissatisfied, but he began more clearly to perceive she was not cultured in his sense; she had a refinement of emotion beyond his, whose refinement was intellectual, but he was conscious that she had not the habit of an atmosphere of refinement. She would not leave old slippers in the middle of the drawing-room because it was untidy, while he would not leave them there because it was ugly. The little things, so many, of which life is

made, seemed continually to bring up this difference. Slightly she bruised him and slightly he chilled her. They loved each other and yet were bruised and chilled; they made allowances which were almost criticisms.

One day she came to fetch him at the Settlement. They intended to shop a little and then, after a hasty dinner, to go on to one of the promenade concerts. He was happy with her as they went along Oxford Street, for the cold wind had stung rose into her dark cheeks; other men looked at her, and Huncote felt proud to be with a woman at whom other men looked. And Sue, keeping very close to him, felt that other girls envied her. They knew each other to be desirable then, because others seemed to think so; they were dogs in each other's manger, possessive, therefore lovers. It was amusing to shop, to differ, and so easily to give way, just to resist enough to have the pleasure of surrendering. They bought a new bottle for his dressing-case; they went into Selfridge's to buy a veil, and Sue did not feel too shy of the young ladies who seemed to respect her. It was lucky she could not read thought and realise the envy of the young lady at the veils who wondered whether the nice young fellow had picked her up inside or outside the shop. Sue was treated to a pound of chocolates at the *Maison Tigre*, and as they crossed the road she remembered just in time, for anxiously she had opened the box and was preparing to put a chocolate in her mouth. They stopped nearly opposite, at the picture shop, and Sue looked very respectfully, at the autotypes, "The Laughing Cavalier", "The Majordomo." She stared for a long time at "Mona Lisa", then said:

"Don't she look wicked?"

This offended him a little, and he took her round the corner, but there, before "The Bath of Psyche", Sue grew rigid.

"I know I oughtn't to like that," said Huncote.

"It's too well painted, it leaves nothing to the imagination; but still, Leighton in paint is a bit what Walter Scott was in writing. That reminds me, have you read any Walter Scott?"

"No."

"Well, you might like one or two; *The Heart of Midlothian*, for instance, unless —" He remembered Sue's prudery and understood her attitude before "The Bath of Psyche." "Sue," he said, "what's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing," she said, but looked very embarrassed.

He felt tempted to laugh at her.

"You think the lady hasn't got enough on, don't you?"

She was silent for a moment, then burst out:

"I think it's horrid, horrid! How *can* people show those things — in the street. They ought to be locked up, all of them." He laughed and she grew angrier. "It's wrong, makes one think of all sorts of nasty things."

He was on the point of asking her what there was nasty in them when something else offended him. He remembered George Green who had called the Venus of Milo "Very 'ot!" It chilled him to think that Sue should feel like that, and for the first time, unconscious educator, he wondered whether, even if she so desired, a nymph of Arcadia could become a syrx.

It was difficult to talk to her in the evening for still, owing to the discouragement of visitors, a sort of isolation was about them. Sue would have had no objection to keeping themselves to themselves; no doubt that was her attitude towards life; she had never thought of entertaining anybody except relatives, and that not often; church, perhaps, on Sunday evening, and a music hall on Saturday night and for the rest of it, well, one could always make blouses, while, she sup-

posed, a man would smoke a pipe, or sleep. Only this involved some real work from early morning up to about seven, and neither of them had that. Their life was to be one mainly of pleasure, and they did not know how to take that together. So in the evenings it had turned out a little as Sue expected, for Roger read and smoked, while she, deprived of the chance of making blouses, amended most unsuccessfully those which Theresa had ordered for her in Wigmore Street. She was more familiar with him now, and he with her. That humanised him, and she loved him better when, having confessed to him the history of the novelette, she was allowed to call him "Sir R."; childish lover, she liked to be called "Susie" and even "Suekins." But familiarity which bred ease tended also to breed free and ease, which was not quite so successful. In those days there was a case in the Law Courts which had amused her rather much. She had learnt by heart some of the lover's verses, and one night she recited them to him:

"He sent a letter to his love,
But in his mind he fumbled,
He put that letter in the care of another hand,
Then stumbled
Bow, wow, wow, wumbled."

She recited them with great gusto, especially the last line which she rendered as:

"Bow, Wow, WOW, *wumbled.*"

"Don't you like it?" she asked. "Don't you think it's funny?"

"Oh, yes," he said, rather rigid. "It's very funny."

She did not understand; she laughed unrestrainedly. Indeed she insisted upon telling him all about the case, and in the next days became reminiscent of it. As he went out after breakfast, when he kissed her, she held

him suddenly tight and said: "Let's play lemonade, I'll be the lemon, and you be the squeezer."

It hurt him horribly; he was a serious young man who did not understand the comic side of love. It was soiling, all this, and he did not know what to do, did not understand that at a word, if only he chose it well, the mask of comedy would fall, and under it he would find the serious mouth and the veiled eyes of the love he sought.

She was very lonely when he was out, for she rapidly grew tired of going around the house, examining her new possessions. She knew the furniture now, and even wonderful little details like the glass shelves in the bathroom were ceasing to thrill her. Also Sue could telephone painlessly. The telephone training had been rather fierce. Within a few days of their arrival in the house it had rung suddenly as they came in. As he had used his latchkey Rhoda was not there, and, in a spirit of mischief, Huncote rushed Sue to the instrument, seized the receiver, put it in her hand, against her ear, and then said: "Go on, talk!" For a few moments he stood and laughed helplessly at the cruel spectacle of Sue hanging on to the instrument with both hands, speechless, her mouth wide open, her eyes bulging. "Go on, talk!" he said. "Who is it?"

"I don't know," Sue whispered miserably. "Oh, I can't hear what they're saying. Who is it? Oh, I wish they'd go away."

"Take care," cried Roger, "they hear you." This made Sue stamp with rage, and yet she could not let go. At last she flung him a furious look, dropped the receiver with a bang, and ran up-stairs.

The machine terrified her. She was not accustomed to the pitch of the voice, indeed she did not quite know what to do with the receiver when the operation was over, and she got into the most awful messes with the exchange because when told to call up a number she

mumbled it and, when pressed to be clearer, gave her own. They had to practise, and Sue learnt just in time. For after a few experiments her husband rung her up, pretending to be the Archbishop of Canterbury, which idea almost reduced her to hysterics. She learnt just before it began to bore him.

She learnt to shop a little, too, to consult with Ethel in the morning as to what the menu should be, to be repressed when she hinted that Welsh rabbit or pickled pork was rather nice. "I thought to myself we wanted a change," she said timidly, but Ethel was polite and immovable.

She was lonely because she hesitated to avail herself of the leave which her husband had given her to see her old friends. She would have liked to see them apart from him, but as they all worked during the day it was impossible to have them alone. She lunched once or twice with Ada Nuttall, and that was helpful, for the desire to entertain her friend taught her to affront the Criterion. It had been a slight adventure, that order at the Criterion, wondering all the time during lunch whether the five pounds that she had in her purse would be enough, "for you never knew, with all those French things on the bill." The Criterion surprised her because it seemed so cheap, and it was successful, this party, for it made Ada together rippish, careful, and rather respectful: to be entertained like this by a fellow, it was all right, but coming from another woman it implied more than money, it implied class.

Ada Nuttall came up one evening after dinner with another one of the girls, Miss Thorpe. They were both very anxious to be easy and to "pal-up" with Roger, only it was a little difficult to "pal-up" with him; it might have been managed in the Park, but not in Pembroke Square, in presence of a Jacobean dresser and an obvious rent of a hundred a year. Things were not made much easier by Sue having begun the conversa-

tion to Ada by saying, "Well, you *are* a stranger!" Roger dimly felt this was not hostessish. The beginnings of the evening were very tongue-tied and consisted in the two girls being shown various things by Sue. They seemed much embarrassed; carpet, curtain, ornament, nothing escaped; everything was "lovely" or, to vary, "so nice." In despair, Roger, being one angle of a square, the other three angles of which were the three young women, compelled them all to drink port; he had a wild idea that if he could make them drunk it might be easier, and he was struggling not to lapse into Settlement manners. He succeeded all too well, for Miss Thorpe became much more rippish than Ada and told a long story about the goings-on at the manicure parlour. Sue was rather taken with this new rip and asked when she could see her again.

"Let me see," said Miss Thorpe, "what-th the date-th?"

Ada and Sue laughed abundantly, and Miss Thorpe encouraged, when a little later Huncote asked her, apropos of travel, whether she liked Brighton, replied:

"I should shay sho."

He was sorry somehow when the effects of the port subsided. He left them to themselves, but even then conversation stumbled. Miss Nuttall and Miss Thorpe, try as they might to carry it off with the air of girls who were used to manicuring the aristocracy, could not pretend that they were used to this sort of thing.

Later in the evening Miss Thorpe called Sue "Mrs. Huncote"; she was not of the class that would have called her "M'am", but somehow this was quite as bad. Dimly Sue felt friendless, as if she had lost the old and not gained the new.

II

At Pembroke Square, when they came in, Mrs. Huncote introduced a kitten. Three months later it had

developed into a young but athletic cat. One day the cat, growing venturesome, brought down most of the glass on the upper shelf of the pantry, together with various pots of jam. This puzzled Rhoda, not the jam but the glass, for evidently it was for the lady of the house to look after the glass. She told Sue:

"Princess Saragamovsky was very particular about her glass, M'am." Then for a moment Rhoda felt tempted to be human and to tell her mistress where to go; but Rhoda was too well-trained a servant; her humanity flickered and went out.

"All right," said Sue airily, "I'll order some to-day, and while I'm about it I'll get some jam. Mr. Huncote says he's tired of raspberry and currant; too many pips in it."

The athletic cat had, it seemed, broken so many of the tumblers, actually nine out of twelve, that Sue did not trouble to take one as a specimen. She thought she would just buy what she fancied.

Two days later Roger held up in his hand a tumbler, a large, heavy glass.

"Hallo!" he said. "These aren't our usual tumblers, are they?"

"No," said Sue, unconscious of offence, "the cat broke most of those, so I had to get some new ones."

Huncote was not a man to whom the delicacies of glass or linen meant much unless they were absent, and there was something decidedly wrong in this massive glass, thick, greyish, machine moulded, with a dreadful squidgy twirl at the bottom where the glass had come off the mould.

"They were only three-pence-ha'penny," said Sue. "It's wonderful how cheap they make these things nowadays."

He did not say anything, but when next morning he precipitately put down a spoonful of strawberry jam that seemed at the same time to be sticky, musty, and

carefully kept together with pink glue, he lost his temper.

He was unjust; he did not understand whence came the impulse to pay three-pence-ha'penny for tumblers, or to buy jam at fourpence a pound, cheap jam, jam which was advertised everywhere, jam made in vats, out of turnips, glucose, and stalks. He did not understand that she could not spend because she had never spent, that if she were to be natural she must still buy what the poor bought. When a little later he understood, in his folly he wished she had flung herself vampire-like upon the luxuries of her new class. He would not have liked it either if she had, but this was a love relation and not made to be satisfied. He could not gauge the depth of Sue's fear, of her hesitation before silver coins, nor the humility still more cruel that made her pass shops in Piccadilly and tell herself, if she thought at all, that their wares were not for the likes of her.

III

"You know," said Huncote, "it was awfully decent of you to help Sue."

"Not at all," said Theresa, with something false in her voice. "I rather liked it; she's sweet. There's something so fresh and ingenuous about her; and something humble which hurts one sometimes, as if she didn't know how sweet she was."

"Yes," said Huncote, and paused. It was embarrassing, this praise. If he had been a man of the world he would have suspected Theresa of wanting to slay a rival by sickening the rival's lover from love into gratitude. But had Huncote been a man of the world he would have been wrong, for Theresa was sincere, and nothing is so deceptive as that. For a long time he said nothing but just smoked on, lighting another ciga-

rette from the stump of the one he had just finished. He disturbed Theresa; he was becoming a chain smoker; that was new, and the new always disquieted her. Still, she hesitated to grow personal.

"I haven't been very well," she said. "I must go away soon."

His face suddenly expressed concern.

"Not well?" he said. That was his voice speaking, but behind the voice something inside his heart whispered: "Going away!"

And Theresa, so remote were they both just then, thrilled at his voice as if she heard only the unspoken whisper.

"Not for very long," she said reassuringly, "just for two or three weeks into the country. I always feel washed out in the spring."

He looked at her more closely: indeed she did look pale, and there was a faint purple zone around her eyes that made them deeper and more humid.

"Are you going to friends?" he asked.

"No, I shall go somewhere alone; I might take Elizabeth to bully me and tuck me up."

"Because I was thinking we might be going away for a while, I don't know where."

He did not, for he had only just thought of it and was not aware that he had just thought of it.

She understood but did not respond. She had borne it all very well so far, though she had begun to feel that she cared for him more as she grew more certain of having lost him. No, she could not bear that. She thought of Sue, and for a moment hated her; then she despised herself for hating the guiltless, also for desiring one who did not desire her. She told herself that she must not go on with this conversation, that it was too much for her, would make her say more than she meant, might make her say all she meant, which would be far too much. She felt her hands clench; she looked

at them, saw the knuckles redden, and thought: "That makes my hands ugly; well, they ought to be ugly to him; so much the better." And, as she so thought, found herself woman, desirous of attracting, and unclenched her hands, let them fall, white and long-fingered like sprays of fern. She thought: "I must not speak to him," and murmured: "But you won't miss me!" Before he could reply she rescued herself and added: "Sue's all right now."

He had not understood; he was too young to have a quick ear for the whispers of love; as yet, he could hear love only when it bellowed, and he thought of Sue with a faint feeling of disloyalty.

"Sue? Yes, oh, yes. Oh, it's quite all right."

He was lying, and they both knew it. They stared into each other's eyes, sorrowful and as if determined to hide their mutual lie.

"Only," he went on, "it's — it's difficult. I can't explain — I expected it to be difficult — It's all so new to her — little things."

Theresa felt her heart grow narrow; she did not know, but she had a vision of little things, intonations, errors of tact, little things so big, and he would not tell her; she knew he would not tell her, he would be too loyal. She wished he would tell her if only to have his confidence, and yet she knew she would hate him if he told her, for giving Sue away. He went on:

"I don't know what I mean, Theresa, but it's so complicated, taking somebody out of one life and pushing her into another. It's not just changing over from cotton gloves into kid. One wants to change the hand as well as the glove."

"Roger! You don't want to change the hand!"

"No, of course not, that's a figure of speech. Only it all seems so difficult because . . . Well, you see, there I am in the Settlement, and then I come back — I thought — women had their own friends and when I

came home — there'd be somebody there. You see what I mean?"

Theresa laughed. "Sultan! You want to come home and find the dancing girls waiting for you."

"It's not that; I hardly know what I mean."

"I do," said Theresa, "you want the ordinary household, with 'At Home' cards stuck into your looking-glass, and a little dinner waiting for you, with the menu written in French. After dinner, when you and the other men have had enough port and, if tradition does not lie, improper stories, you want to come into the drawing-room and find four nice women, excellently gowned, with whom you'll discuss the play, the weather, the country, whom you'll tell what they ought to think about politics, whom you'll put right on any subject except dress; before dress you'll assume a humorous attitude, half-disdainful, half-worshipping. At five minutes to eleven the first couple will say: 'We really must go; thank you so much.' . . ."

"Don't!" cried Huncote.

But Theresa was merciless.

"You're like all men, you expect marriage to be the great solution, to be wafted by the registrar's wand into a world where everything, games, society, household, art, sick-nursing, travel bureau, will be available for you when you press a button. Or, better still, where everything works so smoothly that you only have to tell your wife to press the button. It's not a woman a man ought to marry, it's William Whiteley's."

He did not reply for a moment; he did not seem to mind the onslaught, and said: "I'm not thinking of all that. The main thing's love."

"Well," said Theresa, in a voice suddenly hard, "haven't you — isn't . . ."

"Oh, yes," he said, and his voice was impatient. "Only, somehow — one's always alone. It's so difficult for her, being used to what she is. She had one

or two of her friends the other night — she liked that but . . .”

“But you didn’t?”

He grew aggressive.

“I asked them to come myself.”

She saw that she had been tactless, and swerved.

“But your own,” she said.

“We’ve had an at home; you know, for you came; that was all right. Only one gets so lost among a lot of people. It’s something else — not what they call society, but a feeling — oh, how shall I put it? — that one knows a few people who like one, and who don’t criticise one, only . . .” He did not like to finish the sentence and to say, “only they do criticise my wife.”

She understood.

“Aren’t you a little impatient?” she said. She felt so much older than he. She remembered that at home: yes, Sue had behaved all right there. She had been like an excited child with shining eyes, and looked charming. She had not said much and only at the very end had she warmed up and talked. Perhaps she had talked too much, for Theresa remembered that she had heard her say to a young soldier who was paying her a compliment: “Why this thusness?” She smiled to herself, for that phrase had evidently been learnt in the Ada Nuttall school. But her smile faded, for Huncote had thrown away that eternal cigarette and rested his head upon one hand, half-hiding his face. She leant forward.

“Roger!” she said. “Do be a little patient; do try to understand. Yes, I know it isn’t easy for you, and you knew it wouldn’t be; but I know you can do it. You’ve only got to care for her enough, and she’ll become just what you like, and everything will become just what you like. Try! Help her a little. If she can’t make for you the society you need, well, you must

make it; you must entertain a little. Don't throw yourselves like that upon each other; don't always be looking only at each other until you see nothing except what's wrong."

He looked at her sideways, still unhappy.

"D'you think I could?" he said. "D'you think I'd know how? Oh, I feel a beast for talking like this."

Theresa put her hand upon his arm.

"Don't be afraid," she said, "it's only fear makes you weak, and only weakness makes you unhappy. Be a little more ready to face the world and let it say what it likes. It isn't so very far to eternity; why not learn how to cast roses under your feet as you walk upon a road that need not after all be so dusty?"

He did not reply for a long time, and then her optimism, her certainty of him, filled him with a new strength. He turned, he gripped her hand; he liked to feel it long and rather hard, and he looked into the dark eyes that seemed so tender.

"You're the best of friends," he said huskily.

She pressed his hand, and there was a bitterness in her as if she felt that she had parted him still more from her by her kindness and his need. Never before had she loved, but often she had been near love, and she guessed what there was in it of hardness, almost of cruelty, of desire to conquer; she knew that the path to love is not the path of roses of which she spoke, but a path of roses and thorns. And so it hurt her abominably that between her and Roger Huncote it should all be so easy and so sweet.

He felt different when alone. He had laughed before he went, but now in the street, where night had fallen as a screen of black velvet swathed in mists that gleamed as a peacock's feathers, he was again confined, and around the world looked awkwardly.

There was quite a group upon his doorstep; outside stood a van and in the front garden a crate from which

straw had scattered. A little way back in the hall stood Sue, rather flushed, her arms akimbo as if she were holding the pass against the carter and his mate who filled the doorway with a menacing air. Just behind Sue he could see the helpless black-and-white hovering of Rhoda, evidently trying to reconcile diplomatic intervention with the traditions of unobtrusive parlour-maiding. He heard angry voices.

"I didn't arsk yer for nothin' . . ."

"You can 'ave yer money back if yer like . . ."

Then to his horror Sue's voice: "Shut yer noise!"

He shouldered his way past the two men and nearly laughed, for Rhoda, as if she had never heard such words before, leant limply against the wall. But he was anxious too and angry.

"What's this?" he asked. "What does all this mean?"

There was a babble of explanation.

"They say it isn't enough, and yet I gave them . . ."

"We didn't arsk the lady fer nothin', sir; only when we brings in a chest as weighs a 'undredweight . . ."

"Took us 'arf an hour to unpack, sir."

"But . . ." said Huncote.

Sue seized him by the arm.

"Roger! I only had twopence!"

The carter began again: "We didn't arsk the lady fer nothin', sir."

The facts began to sort themselves out. A large oak chest they had bought a few days before had arrived. The men had unpacked it, taken it up to the first floor and moved the furniture about to make room for it. Then Sue had given them twopence to share. But while he pieced this together the row continued, and Rhoda intervened.

"Please, M'am," she whispered, "if I give them a shilling it'll be all right."

Sue grew scarlet at this public insult.

"Who told you to interfere? I don't want any of *your* lip."

"Sue!" cried Roger, horrified. Then, turning to the men, he gave them two shillings. The door closed, and with magical skill Rhoda disappeared.

"Sue! How could you?"

She was still flushed and still kept her hands upon her hips.

"How could I what? Don't see what I've done."

He was impatient.

"Sue, you must know twopence wasn't enough."

"They ought to be jolly glad to get twopence; might have given them nothin' if I liked."

"It would have been better if you had."

"Twopence is twopence," said Sue, and it hurt him to feel that to her twopence was still horribly twopence.

"Look here," he said, "you've got to understand; you've got to tip properly or not at all."

Sue's mouth grew tight, and she looked at him, hostile, from under her brows. "Got to understand?" she said.

"Yes."

"I s'pose you think I don't understand anything; not good enough for you."

"Sue, dear." He took her arm, but she shook him off angrily. At that he lost his temper. "For heaven's sake, don't stand like that with your hands on your hips; you look like a wash . . ."

Sue's hands fell; she stood away from him, suddenly livid. "Oh," she said, "like a washerwoman. Is that what you were going to say?" He was frightened by the intensity of the low voice. "Like a washerwoman!" she repeated.

She turned and ran up the stairs, and it was cruel, it was tearing to hear her cry as she went.

It was a terrible evening, and Sue got her first lesson in the manners and customs of the stoical upper ten by

being curtly told to dress and come down to dinner as usual. They ate very little and said nothing at all; they sat, he determined and feeling as if frozen stiff; she rather withdrawn in her chair, sullen, determined not to look at him, making bread-pills and staring before her: it maddened him to see her make bread-pills. They ended their dinner without a word, under Rhoda's icy chairmanship.

They tried to talk a little in the evening, of what could be done for Perce who, it seemed, did not like the new office. But that was a failure; it was not an abundant topic. Roger read out a few scraps from the evening paper; he nearly asked her whether she would like to go to "The Sunshine Girl" but stopped just in time, determined not to make advances. Towards the end of the evening he wanted to make advances; he felt that however right he might have been at bottom, he had lost control, he had been unkind. It hurt him dreadfully to see his dark girl who could be so tender, like this, silent, with downcast eyes and a heavy mouth, abominably civil as if determined to show him she could be as civil as he. They were at the acutest point of conflict when nothing is said, when nothing is conceded, when there is no promise that after anger will come peace, when between two people there is just a black blanket of difference.

At half-past nine, with merely a "good night", she went to bed. He hesitated as he opened the door. Never before had she gone to bed without kissing him. He felt he ought to kiss her, also that he wanted to and yet that he ought not to want to, still more perhaps that if he were really fine he ought to kiss her in spite of what she was. But the emotion was too complex, and before it came to a solution the door closed behind the stately sailing past of her sturdy figure, with the high-held head that suggested insult and injury. He went out for a very long walk right round the Gardens

and Hyde Park; he wanted to tire himself out, and he wanted to think, to try and look into the future a little. He did not succeed; facts only came to him and of facts only could he think again and again — of Sue telling Rhoda that she wanted none of her lip. But towards the end, as he came down Holland Walk that was dark and full of the peace of a country lane, a walk where there were benches snugly hidden and friendly darknesses from which came the soft murmurings of lovers, the hardness of him melted. He had been hasty, he had been unjust. He was full of pity for himself, full of pity for her, full of fear for their joint lives, hardly hopeful that he could make of them, even by patience, even by skill, what Theresa had promised. Still, as he put the latchkey into the lock, he thought: "There it is, we must try."

The house was dark and he went softly up to his bedroom. Outside Sue's he paused for a moment; he could hear nothing. He sighed; it was his habit every night to go to her, to hold her to him for a while, perhaps without speaking, feeling closer to her in the darkness and in the silence when they were just man and woman, when no class, no custom, nothing intervened to spoil the tenderness of their clasp. But not to-night; he felt he could not to-night. To do such a thing after such events would have spoiled all the other beautiful moments by making the exquisite communion into a daily convention.

So he went into his bedroom and slowly undressed. But in his pyjamas again he thought: "I've been unjust. Perhaps she's awake, thinking just that. No, she would not think I'd been unjust; she'd think I'd been hard on her." It hurt him to think that. "After all, one of us must make advances; why should it be she? If I'm any use it ought to be I."

He slipped on his dressing-gown, very softly opened the door. His plan was typical of him: if she was

asleep he intended to sit by her bedside, holding her hand until the early morning; when she awoke she would see him and understand. He was still Cardinal Quixote, finding romance in this idea of a lover remorsefully watching by the bedside of his beloved. But when he opened the door, he found that she was not asleep; he could see her head outlined against the pillow, a great mass of hair. It wrung his heart, for she was lying on her face, clasping the pillow, and the room was all filled with a dreadful little choked whimpering that came to him muffled by the pillow. He ran to the bed, seized her roughly in his arms, and turned her to him. She would not come at first; she clung to the pillow in which still were stifled her sobs, but at last she seemed to grow weak, and he turned her to him, holding her close. As the pillow fell her sobs became loud. She was wailing like a baby, with her mouth all distorted; she shook against his breast.

"My darling," he murmured into her hair. He tried to say: "I've been a brute", but he could not; even in that minute he was not sure that he had been unjust. Little by little her sobs grew less, became slight, ended. She held him close with both hands, content and at rest, or perhaps exhausted. He bent to kiss her wet face; she opened her eyes and drew back.

"Oh," she murmured, "I ain't good enough for you, I know I ain't."

The humility and the sweetness of her under the untrammelled grief melted him. He did not at all understand how exasperated and unhappy she had been, how exiled, how lost among people who were not hers, with strange manners and hostile customs; he knew only that she was sorry, that both had been hasty, cruel, childish.

"My darling!" he said again, and kissed her with the dull certainty of the male who believes that with a kiss he can heal any woman's ills.

IV

Mrs. Groby was flustered and rather hot. Her daughter and her son-in-law could not cope with her indignation. Even her bonnet was excited.

"Never heerd of such a thing. Set me down there in the middle of the road and said: 'You follow yer nose, there's plenty of it,' an' off 'e goes!" She fanned herself violently with *The Daily Mirror* and blew.

"But, Mother, you ought to know your way by now," said Sue.

Mrs. Groby bridled as she had been taught to do by her mother in old Sussex days.

"Well, I don't need *you* to teach me, Miss. And that's not the worst of it. I put it to *you*, Roger. I got inter th' Archway bus as usual, and I says to 'im: 'Yer put me down at Pembroke Square, young man!' just as I'd been told. I thort there was somethin' wrong, I did; I went wand'rin' round and round all sorts o' places called Pembridge something." Huncote laughed. "You may laugh; 'adn't been 'ere more'n once, and then"—her tone grew serious—"only w'en you brort me in a taxicab."

"What did you do?" asked Huncote, amused.

"I got inter the nex' bus. Dunno w'ere they git their conductors from; 'ave 'em made to order, I should think. W'en I told 'im, d'yer know wot 'e said?" She flushed. "Do yer know wot 'e said? 'E said: 'You should give up the drink, Mother!'"

The Huncotes laughed.

"Well, have a drink of tea," said Roger, "and don't think any more about it."

Mrs. Groby drank her tea, accompanying her praises by subdued murmurs and sharp inclinations of the head to which the bonnet electrically responded. In

her mind she was still telling-off that young man, but the tea took the flow out of her ideas.

She was alone with Sue for a little while as she had to be shewn the house over again. The first time she had been overwhelmed; this time she was a little censorious. The window boxes on the drawing-room balcony in which the bulbs had begun to flower particularly irritated her.

"Only makes dirt," she murmured, "w'en the wind blows in."

She disliked also the famous glass shelves in the bathroom. "Wot'll 'appen if yer go in in the dark an' bang yer 'ead?"

Sue had too slender a grasp of her own establishment to explain that she had servants to clear up the dust from the window boxes, and that one did not bang one's head when there was electric light. Moreover, she stood in considerable awe of her mother, who now went round the house, still grumbling at the chintzes that were too light and would soil, at the lace curtains which could not save one from being overlooked. She was in one of the moods that often affect women of her kind when for an hour at a time children are taken along the street to the accompaniment of much scolding and arm-dragging. The separate bedrooms especially irritated her. She discerned in the arrangement something peculiarly cold-hearted. "Might as well each 'ave yer own 'ouse while yer about it," she remarked.

Sue timidly pointed out that in her bedroom there was very little space for two. "Space?" Mrs. Groby snarled. A vision of early days when Groby was only a labourer and she gave birth to three children in the single room which was also a kitchen deprived her of all expression. Besides, Sue, whom this still embarrassed, was not an eloquent advocate. "Treat yer well?" asked Mrs. Groby, and suddenly before the girl

could reply: "Yer look bad, a bit pulled about the eyes. Still, that's nothing, that's the spring. 'Ow d'yer like it?"

Sue hesitated; she was not used to expressing strong emotions. "Oh, it's all right," she said vaguely.

Mrs. Groby laughed. "Well, if that's all yer've got ter say fer yerself! Is 'e fond of yer?"

Sue blushed. "Don't be silly, Mother; he wouldn't have married me if he weren't."

Mrs. Groby nodded a great many times as if she could have said things of great significance and then decided not to say them. "Expect it's all right," she said, "can't see yer've got anythin' to grumble about except that I shouldn't like to 'ave them servants about, myself, spyin' on yer and always wantin' to be gaddin' about." Mrs. Groby deeply distrusted strangers under one's roof.

"One gets used to it, Mother," said Sue, very staid and suddenly conscious of importance. "I wouldn't like to have to do the housework here myself."

"You've got no call to now. Yer a lady now and don't yer forgit it." She grew thoughtful. "I never should 'ave thort ter see a daughter of mine livin' like this. I used ter think — but there, I won't talk about it."

They grew silent, both of them, for Sue understood that her mother's memory had fled to Bert. Mrs. Groby had always thought a lot of Bert, who was earning good wages and could give his wife two rooms; she had been a little anxious about that, for she "did not believe in children beginning where their parents left off." This restored intimacy; it was as if the past linked mother and daughter, which the present could not do. Sue showed her mother some of her clothes and now was not rebuked. They did not look as if they would wear very well, Mrs. Groby thought. "But still that's wot the people wear who are photo-

graphed in the paper." She did not like the filmy silk stockings much.

"Like wot they wear on the stage," she said. "'Ardly decent, I calls it. But there, yer know best now yer a lady."

Sue did not care to show her her latest and lowest cut evening frock. There was trouble enough over a lacy nightgown. "Yer can do wot yer like, but it's the sort o' thing that'd be worn by a painted Jezebel, wot the dogs all ate up, except 'er 'ands an' feet, as the Bible says."

Sue was glad she had not seen the evening frock, for it was not only low cut, but also so designed in the skirt as to expose a good deal of silk stocking.

They stayed up-stairs rather a long time. When they came down they were at peace and more intimate, so much so that their intimacy endured in Roger's presence. News was given: Grandpa Challow was failing. It had been a bad year for the bees again, and this seemed to prey upon him.

"'Ad a bad attack of religion, 'e 'ad; went round the village singin' a song about layin' up treasure in a place w're the moth doth not rust or somethin'." (Mrs. Groby's scriptural knowledge was patchy, and her quotations generally suggested that anything out of the Bible was much the same as anything else and meant nothing.)

Huncote remembered the gentle old man with the sweet Sussex drawl; he would not hear of his going to the workhouse.

"Give me his address," he said; "he must be looked after."

Mrs. Groby and Sue looked at him with wide admiring eyes as if he were Merlin, able with a word to create wealth and ease. To look after Grandpa Challow, together with all he was doing! Mrs. Groby felt the need to render up accounts.

"Perce's gettin' on all right," she said, "thanks to you,—Roger." (Slight effort over Christian name.) "An' no wonder," she added proudly, "'e's a sharp boy; 'e's keepin' the stamp-book now in the office, and every now an' then he says ter me, 'Mother,' 'e says, 'yer can't tell wot temptations we 'as with all them stamps lyin' about,' but Lor', I can trust 'im."

"How's Muriel?" asked Roger.

"Learnin' the violin," said Mrs. Groby proudly. "Dunno as I quite like it either; she 'as to practise in the evenin', an' wot with that an' wot with the cats it drives me old man to the Red Lion, it does." She grew grave. "Still, that's edication!"

Other family news was given: it appeared that the aristocratic relative, the cook in North Audley Street, had taken to noticing the Grobys now. "But," said Mrs. Groby, "that won't wash."

There was a moment of general shrinking; the three felt that this kind of metaphor had better be left alone.

"After giving us the go-by all these years," Mrs. Groby went on, "she's not comin' along velvet-pawin' me. She says ter me, 'I only want to be good friends, I've been so busy.' 'Oh,' I says to 'er, I says, 'd'yer think I've forgotten wot yer said to my Aunt Loo w'en I married Charlie?' That closed 'er up. It's not wot people says as matters; it's the things they does! 'An'-some is as 'an'some does! Yer won't go wrong if yer sticks ter that."

The cousin who taught music for three pounds a week had, it seemed, also reappeared. They wanted nothing material but only the glamour of association with the promoted Grobys. But Mrs. Groby was keeping herself to herself in the strictest way.

"Makes me won'er sometimes 'ow some people 'ave the face. Wouldn't catch me doin' things like that, making up to people wot wasn't good enough once upon a time." For a moment they all thought of the strange-

ness of life and the variety of men and women, and Mrs. Groby said: "Well, well, it takes all sorts to make a world." Rhoda came in, whispered to Huncote. He seemed disturbed. "Oh, very well," he said, "you did quite right."

He did not tell Sue when Mrs. Groby had gone, after two hours and apologising because she had to go now, and must go, and really couldn't stay, that Lady Montacute had called and Rhoda had taken the responsibility of "not at home." Huncote administered half a crown, but at bottom he hated Rhoda; she understood, and it was well she understood, but how dared she understand? To understand was to criticise. He realised suddenly that Theresa was right, that things could not go on like this; that they could not remain isolated or, alternatively, be hunted by one class while eluding another. One day the classes would clash, dislike each other, and in their anger turn upon the young people, leaving them lonely. For a moment he wondered whether he would not be happier with Sue alone in the country — or in the South Sea Islands. He smiled, for Sue had read *The Blue Lagoon* and thought it lovely. But no, it was too late; they were civilised, they were people of the town, and like people of the town they must live. They must plunge into the "giddy social vortex", they must "entertain", they must "see life"; they must affront the complexities of class, the gorgeousness of society,—they must ask six people to dinner.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

THE LAND OF DOUBT

I

SUE sat at the gate-leg table, more than usually embarrassed by the disposal of her feet because she was generally embarrassed. Before her lay a great quantity of paper and envelopes, and pens so constructed that the ink persisted in running up them. She was writing. She leapt to her feet, crumpled up the letter into a ball and flung it to the ground. "That's three," she murmured. She felt inclined to weep, rubbed one eyelid and inked it. "Oh!" she thought. "What shall I do? What shall I do?" And wondered: "Perhaps it wouldn't have mattered. There was only one blot on that one." For a moment she surveyed the dining-room with an air of dismay as if she were locked up, like a little girl who has been naughty and is writing out an impost. But there lay the paper and the paraphernalia, and Chambers's Dictionary wide open; there was nothing to do but to go on.

So rather wearily she sat down again and once more began:

"Dear Mrs. Forncett,

"My husband asks me to say that though I have not yet had the pleasure . . ."

She consulted the letter which Roger had given her to copy. Obviously the pleasure of meeting you. Roger wrote rather badly, she thought. How did one

spell 'meeting'? She thought for a moment. "One spelled 'meat' m-e-a-t. Still, it didn't look like an 'a' quite." She looked it up in the dictionary and then for a moment wondered why "meat" should be spelt, m-e-a-t and "to meet," m-e-e-t. Seemed silly like. Still there it was in print and there you were.

So she wrote:

"... of meeting you. He thinks you will not mind my waiving formality . . ."

She did not pause to consider once more what Roger meant by waving formality about; she had given that up. She finished the letter to Mrs. Forncett. There was no blot. She held it away from her rather proudly, this curious combination of good stiff paper and round handwriting with a steady if insidious slope to the left. She wondered why Roger could not have written the letters himself, he did those things so easily, and she thought how wonderfully clever he was. But he had said that the hostess must do that and, of course, he knew best. So she began again: she asked Mr. Churton; she asked Mr. and Mrs. Lucien Cadorese, a little more easily because she had met Mrs. Cadorese. She had been tempted to keep Theresa until the last because that would be easy and perhaps Theresa would not mind a blot, but a sort of Puritanism made her choose the harder way. And so you will imagine her as for a time the curtain falls, a small sturdy figure lost in a room too tidy, fettered in a gown too tight, the tip of its tongue protruding, swaying a little as it writes:

"Dear Mrs. Cadorese,

"My husband and I will be very pleased . . ."

with an air of determination in which there is some awe and a little pain . . .

II

Never so well as that evening had Sue seen Sir Lucius, Sir R. His new evening clothes had so manifestly been made for him. He had come in to see her while she dressed and looked too wonderful to kiss. That tie and waistcoat so white, why one dared not even blow on them. Nor had he stayed, for Rhoda was watchful and reliable. He went down into the dining room that looked so official, with the table entirely obstructed with everything that one wants for dinner and so many things that one does not. It looked so solemn like that, empty, with the chairs waiting and the napery shining under the light, the big bowl of violets and the crowding pepper and mustard pots. It looked so complex, the dumb waiter with its filled decanters and, it seemed, the endless stores of knives and forks, the concealed bottles and jugs and jars.

Yes, it looked all right; Ethel was no fool. He had had hot consultations with Ethel and Mrs. Beeton. Between them and Mrs. Beeton they had bought enough cream for a regiment. They had dealt with the quantities of Mrs. Beeton in her famous gallon and hundred-weight style. They had wavered over salmon trout, quarrelled over larks and quails. Of course, as this happened in Pembroke Square, Kensington, saddle of mutton slunk in. And the imported waitress had departed the day before to bury a relative, while the substitute seemed dangerous: the door to the basement was open, and he could hear her breaking below. Yes, it looked all right, but there were a few little things he missed, not that he had ever noticed them before: salted almonds and crystallised violets. He felt their absence as one might feel the absence of one's tie: it does not keep one warm but it is there. Yes, he had forgotten crystallised violets. It was too late now. Still, it would not matter; Forncett was always thinking of

something else and Mrs. Forncett talked too much to have time to eat.

But it was a nuisance about Cadoresse, though; he was such a priceless nut. It might be all right, for Cadoresse had advised him about port, having decided when he naturalised to become a connoisseur of port. He sighed and vaguely thought: "I wish it was a quarter past eleven!" But as it was then only a quarter to eight he went up to inspect the drawing-room. It looked very much like the ordinary kind of drawing-room, chintzy, all that. It lacked something, though, he thought; he did not fancy the flowers much. There were narcissi and jonquils, and a big bowl full of hyacinths. It struck him vaguely that he would have liked more, that somehow all this lacked fullness. Yes, there were not enough flowers. Confound it! Why hadn't he done them himself? Why hadn't Ethel known better? For a moment he remained blaming Ethel and Sue, unable to understand the class of Ethel — and Sue, their inability to buy things which did not last, that merely pass, making grace. He remained for a long time warming himself and thinking vaguely that it was rather complicated all this: very necessary of course and amusing. Still, still . . .

Then his sense became active, for through the house echoed the piercing whirr of the bell: first guest.

III

It was only eighteen steps from the hall to the dining room, but it was a very long time. Roger had leisure to think of the funny little battle he had had with Sue over this dinner, a struggle where she gave way and yet resisted all the time, like a child that has a pain inside and believes the medicine will do it good, yet turns away from it because it is nasty. It was all so new to her, so different, this sort of thing. Her tradition laid down

that one did not entertain strangers. Now and then one had relatives in and perhaps one intimate, preferably engaged to a member of the family; this happened strictly at Christmas or when there was a wedding or a funeral in the family; a birthday provided a reason only if it were the birthday of a grandfather or a grandmother, something official. The few visitors she had been allowed to meet frightened her because she suspected them: what did they want, rushing into the house like that? And the loose way in which they asked her to go and see them, people she did not know, shocked her. Of course it was all right, it was fast, rakish, Ada Nuttallish, only it took some getting used to. He did not understand, and she could not explain, so they confronted each other full of narrow determinations and dull obstinacies, erecting barriers where they wanted to build level crossings, unable to see each other's point of view because they were not conscious of their own. They were young, not deliciously but deplorably. They were even too young to be ready to give each other a chance to grow up.

But the door opened and Sue came in, a little breathless; he just had a glimpse of her in the audacious gown that Mrs. Groby had not been allowed to see. She wore the draped evening frock of the day, made mainly of cream ninon, with a charmeuse silk underskirt, cream also, thinly striped with orange; the hips were draped in orange chiffon which ran up under the corselet and repeated itself in touches under the short sleeves that hardly veiled the sturdy arms. Sue was horribly conscious of her body that night, for never before, even in summer time, had she glimpsed her own upper arm when clad. And she shrank a little, contracting her chest, because the orange and gold band, which the Russian ballet had inspired, lay so perilously low across her breast. The artistic feeling of that year, so curiously compounded of Victorian sedateness and Tartar fantasy,

was in her little black shoes and cream stockings with which clashed buckles of orange Russian enamel. It was Theresa's work, and as Sue came in smiling, a little flushed, her face like a very dark rose under her heavy hair, she was charming, for she was southern and yet had no boldness. Yes, Theresa had done her work well except . . . He felt a discomfort he could not analyse, something wrong. But the door at once opened before Mr. and Mrs. Forncett. Introductions. A painful moment, for Sue said: "Pleased to meet you!" But Mrs. Forncett was either a woman of the world or had not heard, for she began to talk while Sue replied. Roger found himself having with Forncett his usual conversation, which was nothing much as Forncett never spoke unless greatly provoked. But it did not matter; as Roger searched his brain for something to say about painting, which was supposed to be Forncett's subject, he could hear Mrs. Forncett raising an agreeably social disturbance:

"What a pretty room! I love chintzes, don't you? They make a room so bright, don't you think so? I'm so glad those black cretonnes with green leaves didn't catch on. Of course it's all right in a large room. You face west, don't you? So, of course, you get the afternoon sun; so nice at tea, don't you think?"

Sue said "Yes", but it did not matter, for Mrs. Forncett added rather unexpectedly: "I wonder when we shall get rid of this dreadful Government?"

Forncett had at last managed to get out a question: Whether Roger didn't find the spring very trying. Roger said "Very", and a little later, as Forncett went on with the subject, replied to the same question: "Not at all." His state of mind was rather complicated, for he was thinking at the same time of what to say to Forncett whose acquaintance he had slid into when the painter was at work for fun on scenery to be used in a Settlement performance, and of what was

wrong with Sue. She had turned away from him and sat on the sofa, completely blockaded by Mrs. Forncett whose agitated mouth was delivering upon her hostess a perfect bombardment. He saw her neck and for a second thought it beautiful. Then he had a curious sensation for which he could not find a word. Or was it the wrong word — something like “bedizenment”? Then Theresa came in, which complicated the situation. He was frankly happy to see her and was conscious of a difference between her and the two women. There was something elusive about the long, supple figure. Very thin, very long-armed, very white in a black silk gown without a waist, touched in unexpected places with little rosettes of red and silver. It was strange, that gown with the rosettes at the breast and those two others placed at the knees. She looked of this world and of another, like a saint with a sense of humour. Sue had not risen when Theresa came in, and that irritated him. So he went to her, rather effusive, feeling awkward afterwards, as if he had held just a second too long the slim, rather hard hand. And Sue seemed to have noticed too: for the first time there was in her voice something cold, faintly hostile, and yet Theresa smiled her own smile, frank and just a little tortured. The Cadoresses were announced. They too were new acquaintances, for Lucien Cadoresse, once a Frenchman and now violently naturalised, had for a while haunted St. Panwich, intending to become its Liberal member of Parliament or its Conservative one, whichever was the more difficult. He had created such uneasiness in the bosom of Platt by threatening to run Labour and split the Radical vote that Huncote had fallen rather in love with him. He was thirty-two, a ship-owner, rather rich and bound to be richer; the combination of his acquired English weightiness with his irresistible French mischievousness amused Huncote. Those two came in as if announced by muted trumpets, for Cadoresse could not travel with-

out trumpets; but twelve years of England had taught him to have them muted. He came in, very dark, very moulded in very new clothes, his trousers pulled rather high so as to expose his passionate black-and-white socks. He did not bow, he said "Good-evening" like an automaton. His moustache, once luxuriant, had suffered the military crop of the English officer. And little Mrs. Cadoresse, four years a matron, yet still a bride, so white, so wondering-blue-eyed, so flaxen-crowned, followed him, smiling and hesitant, as if always she had followed.

The room was full of chatter now, for Mrs. Cadoresse, sweet and shy, had instinctively taken up Forncett because he looked so Spanishly dark, so lonely and unhappy, as if he wanted somebody to talk to him. Roger was reminded of a picture that Sue admired: a dark young Italian bending in a garden over a fair girl; it was called, "First Words of Love." Theresa was smiling at Mrs. Forncett in what Mrs. Forncett probably thought was a cordial way. Roger knew that she was very much amused. And Cadoresse, emphasising his air of English languor, stood behind the sofa talking to Sue, looking at her so steadily with eyes at once fiery and cold that she felt awkward. Sue looked at him sideways now and then; she vaguely felt that he understood her. Indeed he asked: "Ever go to the pictures, Mrs. Huncote? No? Oh, I'm dead nuts on them." She could hardly make it out, the slanginess, the head voice of the gentleman, and the taste which was so subtly her own. She did not realise that this women's man had at once gauged her, assumed her tastes to please her, nor did she see the contrast as, Theresa speaking to him, he remarked: "Cubism? Merely a normal reaction from Futurism, from the exaggerated worship of movement . . ."

But Roger was still uneasy. It was the three women helped him to understand at last. While Churton, who

had just come in with a face that should have compelled him to turn his collar front to back, asked him what he had been doing and made him realise that during the last six months he had had very little to do with the Settlement, his thoughts took form. They ran on a double line. He realised a sort of backsliding in his activities. He had neglected the Settlement, had done other things: walked about, read novels, gone more often to the club, even played bridge in the afternoon. But much more, while Churton tried to approve of conduct that he blamed, Roger looked at the three women and then at Sue. They seemed so severe by the side of his bird of paradise,— Mrs. Forncett with her two or three rings and a single diamond as pendant, Theresa wearing but one jewel, a heavy gold ring with a green scarab, and little Mrs. Cadoresse, so virginal with only her wedding ring and a half-hoop, and round her slender neck a single row of small pearls. He had not felt it long before the others felt it too, and somehow fate was unkind to Sue, for Churton called to Forncett across the room to settle some difference between him and Huncote as to the design of the new frescoes in the lecture hall. For a moment Sue was alone with the three women, conscious a very little of Lucien Cadoresse who talked carelessly, his eyes fixed on her shoulders, conscious very much more of a staring sort of difference between her and them. It was not clothes. Her strong dark hands clasped on her lap showed her that she wore three diamond rings on one, an emerald ring upon the other, that on both her wrists were bracelets, all her bracelets. She felt a heat rise up her body, her neck, there to bring out yet more her emerald necklace, her pendant of ruby and pearl . . .

Both together Sue and Roger, they saw, or rather, they felt. For a fraction of a second they two were divorced from those six guests and communicated through a sort of ether a mixture of hatred and dismay.

And yet Sue did not understand the subtle message. She knew that she was different and she thought:

"I wonder why they stare like that. I s'pose they haven't got as much jewellery as me . . ." For a second she was vulgar and thought: "Well, I'm a lady now." But something else, deep in her, that was tender and sweet, said: "Poor things! What a shame they shouldn't have jewellery too. I wish I'd known, I wouldn't have put it on; it's so hard on them to let them see it. If only I'd known . . ."

Rhoda was on the stairs, preparing to announce that dinner was served. She paused, for her mistress rushed out of the drawing-room, and as she passed mumbled: "Forgotten my handkerchief. Hold on!"

They filed down the stairs, two by two. It was only as they collected around the table, looking for their seats, that Roger noticed a difference in Sue. All the rings had gone except the wedding-ring; even the engagement ring had been shed. There was no pendant now and only one bracelet. He did not know that Sue up-stairs had stripped herself of every trinket, then put on a few of them again, rather at random, wept a few tears and powdered herself over the traces of the weeping so hurriedly that her eyelashes were all white. He had time for anger, but not for thought: dinner had begun, and he had his part to play.

He realised after a while that he had not been very successful in the geographical distribution of his guests, for he had placed the two most talkative women to his own right and left while giving Sue the most difficult man, Churton, in the hope that St. Panwich would yield them something in common. He felt all the pangs of the host, for he wanted to talk to Theresa upon his left, while Mrs. Forncett, who sat on his right, was determined to talk to him. Mrs. Cadoresse, who seemed much too young to be married, was doubtless having a dreadful struggle with Forncett, as usual too tired to

talk. He felt easier about Cadoresse, for, after all, the fellow was a sort of Frenchman and would not notice too great a strangeness in Sue's conversation. But he did not have much time to think, for the dinner, skilfully marshalled by Rhoda and the waitress, was progressing with the swiftness which an ostentatious tradition has taught to the domesticity of England. Never before had he been conscious of the machinery of a dinner-party, which is so like a military action. He could feel the dishing-up below, at the base; then the dishes came up the stairs along the lines of communication, harmoniously deployed upon the dumb waiter to come into action one by one at their regular time, flanked at the exact moment by the proper wine. It relieved him to feel it all going smoothly, to know himself in the hands of skilled people who condescended to pretend that he was their master. But he could not dwell long upon this, for Mrs. Forncett, a little, dark, active woman, was determined to talk about golf. She played at Richmond and, being as well practised in dinner conversation as in the use of golf clubs, she at once dug him out of concealment, compelled him to discuss the inconvenience of clay links. He agreed, and they bewailed the rarity of sand links near London.

"I'm thinking of joining Sandy Lodge," said Mrs. Forncett. "Why don't you become a member too? You'll be able to protect me then. They treat women so badly in golf clubs."

He agreed, and for a long time they analysed the limitations of play imposed on women until, little by little, the conversation threatened to veer to feminism. But nothing helped him. He was the host and too watchful; his eyes roved to see that all had what they wanted; to see whether they were enjoying themselves or at least looking as if they were. He could hear every conversation, Theresa who had gallantly broken through Forncett's crust of silence and after leading him to the new

developments in painting, which was easy as that year there was a new development every week, had passed to music and was discussing Scriabin. He heard her.

"Of course I went to Prometheus. I even went twice, as the programme told me to."

Forncett murmured something about ravings.

"I don't quite think that," said Theresa. "Only there's a sort of over-sensitiveness which you can't render in music, and Scriabin's trying to . . ."

He could hear Mrs. Cadoresse and Churton too. They had got on to Settlement work and, judging from the comparative animation of Churton's face, he was trying to persuade her to help:

"I'm afraid I couldn't," said Mrs. Cadoresse. "You see, Lucien, my husband I mean — I don't think he likes social work much." Churton looked indignant. "I used to do some slumming," said Mrs. Cadoresse, "when I was a girl. We all did."

She looked reflective as if still a young English girl who did everything that was done and ceased to do it when it ceased to be done.

All this time he was conscious of Sue, of her jewels. It was obsessing. Now and then, as the dinner went on, he lost this peculiar sensitiveness and talked wholeheartedly to Mrs. Forncett.

"Yes," he said, "I don't want to give up golf; I really am fond of it for I used to play at Oxford, and you know how a fellow gets ragged if he cares for anything but the boats, footer or cricket."

"That's very interesting," said Mrs. Forncett. "Why?"

To his annoyance he had to explain why, but he wanted to talk to Theresa who for a moment had turned away from Forncett; he wanted to say something simple and laughing, something sincere, silly, like a playful touch of a hand, just to feel near somebody in this formal isolation. But he lost his chance, and time

went on; he caught snatches of conversation, a debate across the table as to whether the tango was immoral and whether certain American states were right to prohibit the turkey trot and the bunny hug. He wanted to watch Sue, to hear what she was saying, but that was impossible for she spoke too low, and Cadoresse had turned towards her, shutting her off a little while he talked. Roger was troubled: what could she be saying? Cadoresse, he knew, was a man who went about a good deal; he was French, but he had been a long time in England; his wife was the daughter of Lawton, the Under-Secretary, so, of course, he met everybody. It was horrible to think that he might be making comparisons between Sue and those other women.

The little smile upon Sue's lips and the nervous play of her hands on the knives and forks might indeed have deceived him; perhaps he would not have been deceived if he could have heard Cadoresse talking to her. He might have understood had he remembered Hilda's conversation at the summer social, and "Cadress the Frenchy" who had picked her up while conducting political investigations in St. Panwich.

Sue was uncomfortable at first, and Cadoresse wickedly increased that discomfort by asking her whether she knew that the Parisian women were bleaching their hair white and wearing yellow fox furs. And wasn't it awfully jolly, and ripping, and other emphatically English questions. She just managed to say that she did not fancy herself white before her time, only to be told that it would be a pity to exchange the starless night of her hair for the pallor of dawn. She looked up at him shyly and said: "Why, that's like poetry." He laughed. He told her she looked like a French girl, being so dark, and talked to her about France and Paris.

"Of course you've been on the Boulevards?" he said, "and isn't the opera lovely?"

Her eyes shone; she had been in Paris on her honeymoon, and this was meeting a friend. She did not know that Cadoresse smiled at her quietly, and how careful he was, naming just the one or two streets and the one or two places which an English tourist would remember. They talked of Paris for a long time and in a moment Sue felt that she knew it well, that she was a travelled, important young woman, for still Cadoresse led her only to places and things that she knew. He gave her no chance to feel ignorant or humble. She looked up gratefully at the women's man.

She felt quite familiar with him, he seemed to understand her. She was not at all afraid of him for he seemed so — well, one might almost cheek him. She drank another glass of hock to which she was ill-accustomed and, a little later, when bending closer to her, he said: "Your frock's lovely; you look like a pale flame," she laughed and replied with a twinkle that was almost a wink: "Why this thusness?" She felt quite Ada Nuttallish as she said that. And Cadoresse did not seem to mind; he understood her so well, it seemed. He was so ready to join her upon her own ground. She did not realise how well he knew her, her class, her tastes, her hopes, her ambitions, her awkwardnesses, and the way to win her a little. She said, quite childishly: "Mr. Huncote says we're to have a little car." He noted the painful "Mr. Huncote", but replied, quite seriously: "And very nice too." She threw him a quick look, not understanding why she liked him, feeling only that somehow there was here an echo of a life long dead and somewhat regretted. He was still flattering her and she was not afraid. It did not occur to her to be afraid of him; why should she? He was married, wasn't he? So, of course, he could not mean anything. Besides, when a man came after one, well, one knew it. She was not quite sure whether she liked men when they came after one, they were so violent and

determined. This Frenchman seemed quiet and detached, so of course he could not be dangerous.

Now and then she looked at Roger, who seemed to be enjoying himself with the little dark woman; she did not half like the idea of having strange women in the house like this when you knew nothing about them. She rather hated Mrs. Forncett, and Theresa too. Mrs. Cadoresse, she thought, looked at Roger too much, and smiled too much. Sue was jealous, she was full of the primitive possessiveness of her class that finds it so difficult to understand social relations and their genial falsity. What was hers was hers; what she wanted she would take; if these women looked as if they wanted to take it must be that they did want to take. She was all instinct, she was too true.

And so the dinner wound on to its end, with Cadoresse lazily playing the fish he did not want, and Roger conscious, through Mrs. Forncett's eternal conversation, of a grave discussion at the other end, between Churton and Mrs. Cadoresse, as to the fate of the Scott Expedition and the value of polar exploration.

IV

Sue was alone with the women. She was afraid. It had not been so bad down-stairs, with that Frenchman making up to her, and the other men to see what she vaguely felt was fair play. And there had been Roger too, though he looked rather coldly at her; but then, he always looked cold. As she went up-stairs with the women, in the middle because she did not know whether she ought to go first or last, she thought of him so handsome, so secure. Though she feared him that night and knew that in his heart he was angry with her about the jewellery, she thought him wonderful. For Roger was still enjoying the rarest fruit of matrimonial victory:

he was still to his wife Madoc ap Gwynedd, the perfect prince.

But it was different with the women alone, and she no longer a woman with men who could tolerate and excuse just because she was a woman and pretty; she was only a human creature with other human creatures who made no allowances, indeed who were ready to handicap her. She felt all this which she did not know, competition among women, fear of age, readiness to slay a rival. And yet she was fortunate, for Mrs. Forncett was too pronounced a golfer to be a woman quite, while Theresa was too handsome, Edith Cadoresse too tender, to wish her ill. Only they were women, and they had to fight the sex battle.

She struggled over the coffee cups; they were still too small for the bits of sugar. She sat upon the sofa, where she had been told to sit, with the three women around her, waiting for her to do the hostess-like thing. For a dreadful moment she felt herself sitting there with her mouth open, nothing whatever in her head, and Theresa watching her with that horrid humorous air of hers; she rather hated Theresa, she thought. It was Mrs. Forncett saved the situation, not because she was much more sensitive than a buffalo, but because she wanted to talk. She engaged Theresa with great vigour on massage, Swedish exercises, Müller exercises, and many other exercises destined to make a figure where there wasn't one. So Sue was thrown on Mrs. Cadoresse. She thought her rather sweet, with her pale corn hair and her eyes like Channel mist. They began to talk of the spring. Mrs. Cadoresse said:

"It makes one feel so young, don't you think? With everything green and crisp and hard, and the sun setting later."

"Yes," said Sue thoughtfully, "the days are drawing out."

Mrs. Cadoresse took no notice, and for a while they

talked of spring in London. Sue thought she was getting on very well now, but Mrs. Cadoresse wandered on to the country and to the seaside, to Brighton, to Italy, to all sorts of complicated, expensive places against which a brief honeymoon in Biarritz did not long avail. Sue felt strained as if she were playing a part without being word-perfect. She was so afraid of putting her foot in it that she hardly dared to walk.

The conversation strayed to clothes and the spring fashions. Here at last was a hyphen, for Mrs. Forncett, having caught Mrs. Cadoresse's remark that the new hats, with the gauze crown exposing the hair, only suited fair women, vigorously fell foul of her, while Theresa, who did not view clothes quite in the same way, also joined in. It went on for a long time, the argument being that black hair under blue gauze was quite as attractive as fair hair under black gauze. She dared make no comments, for the only thing she could think of was seeing these hats from the tops of buses, and that could not be a refined contribution to the debate. So she listened, rather admiring, while they discussed the steady rise of the slit in the skirt, for this was becoming more emphatic as draping replaced the hobble of the year before. Once only did Sue become evident when she enunciated a prejudice against shoes with fancy edges. But Mrs. Forncett was not interested: the excitement of dinner was working in her, and she was passing from clothes, as clothing, to clothes as lure:

"Yes, I'm quite sure the V's going to be deeper this season. I'm very glad, there's nothing like a deep-cut blouse to keep you cool." She laughed. "And if our blouses get V-er and V-er downwards, and our skirts get V-er and V-er upwards, what'll happen, I really don't know. Still, thank heaven for silk stockings. All sins grow excusable if you make the temptation strong enough."

Mrs. Cadoresse looked slightly shocked, but Theresa

laughed, and Sue, who did not understand, decided to laugh too. Mrs. Forncett, thus applauded, developed her theme.

"We've got on in clothes," she said. "Our grandmothers used to see how much they could put on; we experiment to find out how much we can do without." She grew reflective. "It's nice to think you no longer need to wear any underclothes."

This time Sue knew that her mouth was really wide open. Theresa smiled.

"Yes," she said, "I quite agree with you; it's so much easier to drape the human figure from the nude than from the clad."

The disappearance of the petticoat was discussed, but Sue was much more shocked by Theresa than by Mrs. Forncett; it seemed such a horrid way to put it, to talk of dressing from the nude. She was much less offended by Mrs. Forncett's suggestiveness. Indeed she quite liked Mrs. Forncett's story about the girl who was angry at the dance because her partner brought her lemonade. She was easy, anyhow; one could talk with her. She was not like Mrs. Cadoresse who always seemed to be sizing you up like a possible parlourmaid. And Theresa too embarrassed her because she saw something funny in everything. But now she had to talk to Theresa, for Mrs. Forncett was trying to convert Mrs. Cadoresse to sartorial depravity. Theresa said:

"Well . . . Happy?"

Then Sue knew that she was really fond of her. If Theresa had said, "How are things?" or "How are you getting on?" she would have felt patronised and angry. But this was different; it was Theresa's gentleness under Theresa's lightness.

"Oh," she said, "one has one's ups and downs, but still I'm all right."

"I'm glad," said Theresa.

She knew the truth that lay under the awkwardness.

Sue found herself easy again and suddenly realised how straining it had been all that evening to hear talk and to talk about foreign places that she had not been to, plays she did not understand, frocks she did not wear, a life that was not hers. She wanted to open to some one who really understood her, not like Cadoresse, as a woman, but, like Theresa, as a human being. She whispered:

"It's a little difficult sometimes. I don't know why. I never seem to do anything quite right."

"How quite?" asked Theresa.

"Well, I always have to be told."

Theresa laughed. "But you couldn't know without being told, could you?"

Sue looked gloomy. "I dunno, but I feel I ought to."

Something hurt Theresa inside, for that was the truest thing Sue had ever said; she was groping for the instincts of a well-bred woman which alone could help her in unexpected difficulties, and she did not possess them. She had to go about life in an armour of rules, and it was heavy. Theresa took the brown hand and pressed it. She said nothing, but Sue felt tears very near her eyes. "How silly!" she thought. "There's nothing to cry for, is there?" But still she blinked vigorously.

Mrs. Forncett was now talking of cosmetics. It seemed Madame Mendelssohn alone had the secret of lip salve; Charlot et Caillon were hopeless. It sounded very Ada Nuttallish.

The evening dragged when the men came in. Roger looked so hostile, so different. He was Roger, not one's husband. One was anxious when he was about; one might not be doing right for one didn't want to hurt him, and one did so want to be a lady.

Mrs. Cadoresse sang extraordinary songs: it was no good trying to catch the tune. Sue read the title of one of them: "*Ich grolle nicht*," whatever that might mean. And Theresa played; it was easier to catch that

music, though some of her songs too were in foreign languages. She caught two French words: "*charmante Gabrielle*" and, realising that these meant "charming Gabrielle", felt a little better. There was not much talking in the intervals, merely appreciative murmurs and musical discussions about people called Chikeawsky and Mosert. One didn't know what it all was about. At last Mrs. Cadoresse, on Roger's request, played something by a man called Barsch which had no beginning and no end, and was all middle, and always seemed to begin again when it looked like going to stop . . .

They all went rather suddenly about ten minutes past eleven, at the end of the musical orgy. In Sue's ears rang a familiar tune, for she too loved music in her way. It filled her ears, her brain, and all of her as gleefully she sang it to herself, the old familiar tune:

"Liza's tootsies, Liza's feet,
You can bet they'll take the cake
Will Liza's plates of meat."

V

She was relieved when they left: the deepest delight of a hostess is to get rid of her guests. She said:

"Well, it didn't go off half badly."

Roger stared at her moodily and for some moments did not reply. Suddenly, as if something burst within:

"What the devil d'you mean by coming down to dinner looking like Spink's show case?"

"Spink?" said Sue blankly.

"What d'you mean by covering yourself all over with buckles and rings and things? Don't you know better by now?" He was trembling. He loathed himself already and yet could not stop.

"You didn't . . ."

"No, I didn't tell you; of course I can't tell you

everything. Didn't you see how those other women were got up? They knew better than to put on six rings and five bracelets."

"Three bracelets," said Sue miserably, "I've only got three."

Roger clenched both fists.

"I s'pose you'd have worn ten if you'd had ten? Really, this is intolerable."

For a long time she watched him walk up and down the drawing-room, raving at her, vowing she was unteachable, that she didn't listen, that she didn't care. That they might as well go and bury themselves in the country if she was going to make herself ridiculous every minute. He was very handsome, she thought, when he was angry, and she was so humble that she could not be angry too: he knew best. But still, she felt unfairly treated, and she could not say so because she lacked words, and there he was, shouting at her, not giving her a chance. For a moment she was tempted to resist him.

"What's the good of having dimuns if you can't wear 'em?"

But he only raged more furiously. It seemed that diamonds were only to be worn sparingly, judiciously. That there were occasions for no jewellery, and occasions for a little jewellery, and probably occasions for a little more. Sue felt that life was very complicated, and how was one to know? She couldn't explain. When she tried, it was like explaining the plot of three plays mixed with one cinema film. And still the sense of unfairness was upon her. She had not worn all those things at dinner, she had taken them off. She said:

"But, Roger, I went up-stairs and I took off . . ."

"Yes, that makes it still worse. If you had made a fool of yourself the only thing to do was to stick it out, instead of drawing everybody's attention to yourself."

"There's no pleasing you," said Sue.

338 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

The misery in her voice and the neighbourhood of tears sobered her husband. He said:

"Why did you run up-stairs and take them off?" For a second he was hopeful. "Did it strike you that you'd done the wrong thing?"

She did not understand his hopefulness, so she did not tell the lie which would have made peace; she told the truth, so much less useful between husband and wife.

"Well, I thought," she said, "you'd been very kind to me, giving me all those things. They hadn't got any."

"Well?"

"Well, I thought it didn't look nice of me — well, you see . . ." The sentence tailed off.

He did not understand at all. "Not nice? No, of course not, but what d'you mean?"

"What I say," said Sue, suddenly taking refuge in dignity as she found clarity impossible.

"Don't say that!" shouted Roger. "For heaven's sake don't let's have any more of those ready-made phrases. Say what you mean."

"I have," said Sue.

He rushed to the door, shouting: "I can't stand any more of this." But he turned, came back, suddenly ashamed, as if he had struck a child. He took within his her hands which were rigid and retracted, as if they hated his contact.

"Sue," he murmured, "my darling, do try to understand. I don't want you to think me cruel to you, only I do want you to see that you mustn't show off like that, show off your jewellery to other women. It's not nice."

Then Sue began to weep. "I didn't want to show off — It's just what I didn't want to." For a few moments she could not speak, so thickly did she weep. At last in gasps, while he held her close, she managed to murmur: "That's why I went up — they didn't have no

bracelets — they — I didn't want them to — it might hurt their feelings."

He was silent and moved; he understood at last how the little tragedy arose; he understood much too late, as men will, that Sue's flight and sudden discard of jewels were due just to that delicate feeling which he desired in another form. It was cruel: wishing to please him by decking herself out she had offended him; wishing to spare other women, poorer or less beloved, she had become ridiculous in their eyes; by being so delicate as not to tell him frankly what had moved her so to act, she had angered him. He was very unhappy, and yet faintly he hated her because she had made him unjust in his own eyes. He was exasperated, he was afraid of the future, and yet at the same time he was charmed and moved. So, unable to say anything that could help much, he held her close and kissed her until she was comforted. He could not reason; he wanted to comfort her because thus only could he comfort himself. And he had but one thought in his pity: eyes that I have kissed shall not weep.

VI

"Yer look like two pen'orth o' Gawd 'elp me," said Mrs. Groby.

"Everything seems all right," said Sue sulkily.

"All is not gold that glitters," replied Mrs. Groby.

Sue said nothing, for evidently that sort of remark was final, so Mrs. Groby went on, by which is not meant that she went on talking but that she "went on." It appeared that Sue had black rings under her eyes and looked starved, that she had nothing to say for herself. Mrs. Groby, having got to the end of these complaints, uttered them over again. She then became gynecological.

"Oh, no," said Sue, "it's not that."

Mrs. Groby looked at her suspiciously. "Quite sure? You been married eight months; there ort t' be somethin' on the way." She became facetious. "That'll put you right, and 'im too w'en 'e's got to walk up an' down the passage all night with the twins 'owlin'."

Sue did not reply and with apparent irrelevancy said:

"I say, Ma, I wish you'd tell Perce not to send me picture postcards."

Mrs. Groby looked a little surprised, as she did not connect this remark with her prophecy of Roger and the howling twins.

"Postcards?" she said, rather aggressively. "'Ow? 'Oo's been sendin' you postcards?"

"Perce."

"Well, why shouldn't 'e?"

"Not that sort."

Mrs. Groby's eye lit up. "Yer don't mean ter say 'e's been sendin' you pictures of . . ." (A vision of the Scarlet Woman arose in her mind) . . . "bally girls?"

She laughed; it was so like Ma to think of ballet girls in that eighteen-seventy way of hers, as if she did not know that nowadays the chorus was all the go.

"No," she said, "that's not it, only — he sent me that one of the men near the pub, the lilies of the valley. You know, the one signed, 'Cynic', or 'Cynical' or something."

"Yes?" said Mrs. Groby.

"Well, it's not nice. Roger didn't like it."

"Oh, 'e didn't, didn't 'e?" said Mrs. Groby. "There's many a thing a 'usband doesn't like, Sue, but 'e's got to lump it. 'E's your brother."

Sue grew obstinate.

"Him being my brother doesn't give him leave to make —" She hesitated between "dissensions" and "distortions" — "well, trouble between me and Roger."

"Wot's 'e been sayin'?" asked Mrs. Groby. She was

angry; she was not going to have her son-in-law "come it" over her son, even if he was right. "A joke's a joke. If 'e sends you somethin' naughty, you tell me, an' I'll skin 'im alive even if 'e is fifteen. But I don't see wot yer makin' such a song and dance about."

"Roger doesn't like it," said Sue.

"Well, 'e'll 'ave to."

"No, he shan't lump it. I'm s'prised at you, Ma, after all he's done for you."

Mrs. Groby drew herself up. Her voice blended sorrow with dignity. "I thort it'd come t' that," she said. "Now, she's throwin' 'is money inter me teeth. I didn't arsk 'im for 'is money, y'ort t' know. We're 'ard-workin' people; I didn't arsk 'im for a bloomin' tea set."

"Oh, never mind the tea set, Ma; you know I didn't mean that. Only when you think he's got Perce that job and that Muriel won't have to do any work like I did, and that there she is like a lady at the academy — Well, you might do what I ask."

Mrs. Groby changed her line.

"'As 'e been givin' yer the what for? When I see a girl 'umble like, that's wot I always thinks." She looked at her daughter more closely. "You been 'avin' a bit of a dust up at 'ome; that true?"

"One has one's ups and downs," said Sue ungraciously.

"Mostly downs," said Mrs. Groby. "I know, I been married twenty-two years." She grew reflective. "Seems longer. But wot's the trouble? 'E don't lift 'is elbow?"

"Ma! How can you?" said Sue, disgusted.

"They all does more or less," said Mrs. Groby, who knew the world. "Unless they runs after other women. One or t'other, you've got the opshon, sometimes it's both. And then you're lucky w'en you don't get a clip on the ear."

She felt it impossible to explain that hers was not primitive marriage as practised in St. Panwich. She need not have troubled, for Mrs. Groby was not attacking man very bitterly. "That's the way men are, but yer can't do without 'em." She grew sentimental. "I always says there's somethin' about a man — makes a difference like in the 'ouse. So you must put up with it, as they says in the marriage service. You give 'im a good old talkin' to now and then w'en you get 'im in bed and 'e wants to go to sleep; that's the time. A man ain't 'ardly dangerous w'en 'e ain't got 'is trousers on; 'e can't get away."

Sue laughed. "I'll remember, Ma."

The conversation grew more harmonious. Sue felt comfortable in the kitchen; she did not mind being scolded, for was not this her own mother who had brought her up by scolding and arm-dragging for the first five years of her life and by scolding for the next fourteen? What was home without a good old talking-to? She even tried to explain what had happened between her and Roger. She found that difficult as she was not used to explaining. As for Mrs. Groby, she understood not at all.

"I don't see wot yer mean. Wot's 'e give you di'mon's for if 'e don't want yer to wear 'em? Not as I think you ought t'ave 'em," she added. "Di'mons always makes me think of them painted 'ussies. You know, the flashy sort in the Euston Road." She grew thoughtful. "But that ain't anythin' to wot they are in the Tottenham Court Road; they're the 'igh-steppers, they are." Sue blushed. "Don't see wot yer blushin' for; you're a married woman, ain't you?"

"Still, Ma, I wish you wouldn't talk about them; it's not nice."

"My!" said Mrs. Groby. "We're quite the lady, ain't we? Still, talkin' about wot we was talkin' about, I don't see wot you mean. Ladies wears di'mons, don't

they? Tho' 'ow yer tell them from 'ussies, I don't know."

"You hardly can," Sue whispered.

All her puritanism came to the top, and for some minutes in low voices mother and daughter discussed Mrs. Forncett's terrible conversation about low blouses and the proper use of lip salve. Mrs. Groby was shocked and delighted: that sort of thing made you realise that the pictures you saw in *The Daily Mirror* were true. At last she offered Sue a cup of tea.

While Mrs. Groby got the tea Sue enjoyed a sentimental journey. Things had not altered much in Paradise Row, for Huncote had thought it best to let his new family alone and to remain behind them, a sort of St. Anthony of Padua, to be called up if wanted. Beyond the job for Perce he had given an annual allowance for Muriel's education. Mrs. Groby had received a ten-pound note to buy some new furniture. But, of course, she did not buy it. Huncote had had a vision of the rising poor, rising through the medium of a new bedroom carpet and a spring mattress. Only he did not like to interfere, and the ten pounds were not used for these purposes: there had been a great feast, enriched by a middle cut of salmon and unlimited grocer's port. And Mrs. Groby had bought an imitation Crown Derby tea set from Bubwith's show case which had haunted her for twenty years. An impulse of prudence caused her to buy twenty-five sevenpenny insurance stamps for the probable time when Mr. Groby would be out of a job, but the rest had gone in Mrs. Groby's equivalent of wine and women.

So Sue's sentimental journey could indeed be performed. There was the kitchen range with the broken brick at the back; it had always been broken and so remained because Mr. Groby, being a stonemason, was not doing any work in his off-time. It was better so; the broken brick was home. There was Perce's bed,

with a caster off, and the worn place on the boards. She went into the room she had so long shared with Muriel.

It moved her. Under the short leg of the washstand was still the tile. "His Majesty the Baby" hung over the mantelpiece, but Muriel had removed Miss Gertie Millar and put up Mr. Gerald du Maurier instead. That was a pity. Sue sighed: how things changed! Still, such was life. She was glad to gaze once more upon Great-aunt Elizabeth's mourning card. But Muriel's taste, now untrammelled, had injured a little the old atmosphere; Muriel had been learning things at the academy: here was a coloured print of Vera Fokina, engaged in what Muriel called the Russian bally. Evolution! Fortunately, near the picture, there was a large packet of chocolate and peppermints. Sue helped herself to peppermints as she walked round the room. The fragrance of peppermints brought up the good old times, nearly nine months old; so old. She determined to go into Fuller's as she went home to buy some peppermints for private debauches. The past was strong upon her: just for fun she struggled with the chest of drawers, and it thrilled her to feel that the drawers would not open, just as used to happen in the old dead days of misty grace . . .

"Oh, Ma!" said Sue. "How could you?"

The whole of the Crown Derby tea set stood upon the table which shone because Mrs. Groby had polished it with a wet rag. It looked wonderful, blue and gold, and Mrs. Groby had already poured out a cup of tea, black as ink. There was a loaf upon a blue-and-gold platter and a fainting lump of margarine in its dish. Mrs. Groby sat behind her table and her tea set, hands crossed upon her belt. She was beaming. She ought to have had a cap and a large tabby cat. She looked like a picture in the Royal Academy, entitled "The Cottage" or "Home Sweet Home."

Sue did not see anything jarring in this stateliness, but she was disappointed.

"I wish you hadn't, Ma," she murmured. "You see, I wanted to have it like we used to, out of the old brown teapot."

"It's got a broken spout," said Mrs. Groby.

"That's just it," said Sue, "broken spout and all, like it used to be."

"But the teacups don't match!" cried Mrs. Groby, in despair, for her effect had failed.

"Never mind," said Sue, "they didn't use to match. I used to have a pink one, you remember? And the white-and-gold ones, they aren't all gone, are they?"

"No," said Mrs. Groby, "they ain't. But I don't see wot you want 'em for."

"Just as it used to be," Sue murmured again. "You might, Ma, just for once."

She was sentimental, but she was all soft and melting inside, as if the old simple past laughed and wept together in her ears, the old beautiful past when — well, you knew what you were up to.

"There's no pleasin' you," said Mrs. Groby, "now you've become a lady."

But, still grumbling and protesting, she brewed Sue a special cup of tea in the brown teapot with a broken spout. She clearly looked upon this as a fine lady's fancy. If Mrs. Groby had been a historian she would have thought of Madame de Pompadour tucking up her sleeves and making butter in the garden of Trianon.

Sue stayed, for she wanted to see Perce and Muriel.

She would probably miss Perce, who seldom came home from the City before half-past six. But in a few minutes Muriel arrived from the academy. She looked very pretty in her lengthened skirts, rather high boots of glacé kid, and composition gloves, the very nearest thing to leather. Her hair was almost up too, for the brown pigtail had turned into a drooping bun. She laid

upon the table her school satchel and a little bag, mysteriously swollen all over except in one corner where was the obvious powder puff lump. Also *The Days of Bruce* by Grace Aguilar, from the academy library. Then she held out a gloved hand to her sister, said: "How d'you do?" and kissed her upon the cheek with a sacramental air. Yes, she was all right, she was quite happy; the girls were very nice; she got on very well with them, thank you, especially with Miss Bubwith. It seemed that Muriel had been able to help Miss Bubwith on a knotty point in French literature, something in *The Miserables*, by Victor Hugo. The conversation was for a while maintained scholastic, and Sue was given glimpses of the once empyrean circles of St. Panwich, of Caroline Bubwith who had tickets for the Zoo on Sundays, of Gwenwynwyn Davies: they said that Davies, in the High Street, made still more in the drapery than even Mr. Bubwith. And the history mistress was related to an earl. It was all rather daunting and so stirring that Sue was tempted into vulgarity and casually let out that Lady Montacute had called on her. Muriel ate her tea with a fastidious curling of the nostrils because cold fish was well, was well, anyhow, wasn't late dinner. Mrs. Groby said nothing but listened to her daughters, rivals and partners in grandeur. There was a little hush in Paradise Row. It was inhuman even when Muriel confessed that the drill instructress was rather nice, with her long strong arms and her tanned face. She stopped. Muriel could not let herself go and acknowledge that she had a violent rave for the drill instructress, that it was lovely to give her violets and perhaps still lovelier to be told not to be a little fool, in that nice young man voice of hers. No, enthusiasm was not ladylike, Muriel thought; a few more years of progress, and she would think "it wasn't done."

There was a ring at the electric bell. Muriel did not

move but went on with the cold fish as if she expected a maid to answer. Mrs. Groby made as if to get up, but Sue, without thinking, ceded to an old habit, ran to the door and opened it. She recoiled, her knees suddenly all bendy, for there in the bad light stood Bert Caldwell, his bowler upon the back of his head and his hands nervously playing with a galvanometer. They looked at each other, these two, for an apparently long time, hours, time enough to review all their past, to analyse their present, glimpse their future. A whole torrent of memory rose in both, stifling their words,— walks round the houses in Highbury, others on Hampstead Heath, tram rides, hot scones, a garnet brooch making the word "Susannah", kisses in a quiet mews — and vaguely a vision of two rooms once dreamt of, of Sunday, a clean collar, a political meeting, while Carl Marx Caldwell, Holyoake Caldwell, and their little sister, Marie Bashkirtsev Caldwell . . .

It lasted just one second, all that. Then Sue said: "Oo — Bert!"

"Hallo!" he said, with false airiness.

"Fancy meeting you," said Sue.

The electrician took no notice of her.

"'Evening, Mother," he said. "Dining with the countess, Muriel?"

Then there was an awkward little silence, during which Sue wondered why Bert was there. She did not know that he had taken to Mrs. Groby and that he liked to come in for a few minutes after work. She understood that a little later, but what she never understood until much time had passed was that Bert went to see Mrs. Groby to talk to her about socialism, and he told that he would know better when he grew up, just because he liked to sit in the kitchen and remember how he used to go there sometimes and sit with Sue by the window, sometimes kiss her just there, on the right side of the range, when Mrs. Groby went into the next room. (One

could not see the right side from the doorway.) He hated himself for it, but he had to go; it was his one streak of sentimentality and it went right through him; it was his secret vice.

Mrs. Groby felt embarrassed; this was a dreadful situation. It was just the sort of thing which happened at the Holloway when they had a really good melodrama on. But she did not know the rest of her part. Bert made violent efforts to carry things off, but he did not quite know what he was saying.

"Been workin' late?" Mrs. Groby asked in despair, knowing this to be idiotic.

"No," said Bert. "Things are a bit slack just now, now we've done rewiring the town hall. There's a silly job for you! What they want to change the voltage for I don't know, and pull the whole place about; wasting the ratepayers' money, that's what it is."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Groby, "they don't care wot they does." She grew skilful. "Is it true they 'ave champagne lunches?"

Bert came near to gritting his teeth.

"Looks like it from the accounts, especially at the board of guardians. Being a charity place, they begin at home."

"Miss Denny's father's a guardian," said Muriel reproachfully.

Bert laughed. "Well, you can ask her if it's true now that you're in society, Muriel."

"I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing," said Muriel. "We don't talk about things like that, Bert."

Sue felt like a ghost watching mortals. She ought to say something, she must say something, she wouldn't be so obvious then. She faltered:

"Girls have got plenty of things of their own to talk about, Bert."

The young man's face did not move. He said to Mrs. Groby:

"How's that bell I put up for you?"

"Oh, it works beautiful," said Mrs. Groby. "Tho', you know, Bert, I forgits to ring, being used to the knocker."

"You'll have to learn, Mother," said Muriel.

"Of course she'll have to learn," said Bert. "How d'you expect to get any progress if you don't apply modern science in the home?"

There was a little gap during which Mrs. Groby felt humble. She had let Bert put in that electric bell; it had seemed to suit her greatness, and it had pleased him so to do it. It had taken such a long time to set up the batteries in Muriel's room — which had once been Sue's.

Again Sue offered the most intelligent remark she could think up about electricity while Bert, without answering, filled the tolerated pipe of the old friend and lit it. So, after a while, when other topics had been discussed, the temperament of one of Bert's pals, a rather nice murder just then in the papers, human topics that interested her, in which she would have liked to share, she stood up suddenly and said that she must go. She felt outcast, she felt alone. And not alone as one upon a peak who sees below little humanity, but like Ishmael, abandoned in the desert. She kissed her mother and Muriel, then bravely, for the second time meeting Bert's eyes, she shook hands with him. It was dreadful, for their hands were bare, and to feel again the hardness of the workman's fingertips after the soft pointed fingers of men of another breed made her worse than melancholic; in an incomprehensible way it filled her with excitement and an old desire renewed and made vivid. He was so real somehow.

"Good-by," she said unsteadily.

And he too was stirred, for it was so long since he had held that firm little brown hand which looked different now with its pretty nails and its gold bracelet. So just

because he was stirred and unhappy to the verge of tears he was airy; he was even slangy. He replied:

"Cheer oh! Good evening!"

After Sue had gone Muriel went into her bedroom to put her hair straight, for she had to go to the Morris Dancing Class which Mrs. Davies had organised at "The Cedars." Mrs. Groby remained with the young man who sat staring at the range, pulling very fast at his pipe. She wanted to say something, but it would not come. She put her hand upon his shoulder, hesitating, feeling she would like to kiss him and tell him not to take on so. But she felt shy. So she just patted his shoulder once or twice and murmured with a healing air: "Every cloud 'as a silver linin'."

VII

All through dinner Sue was rather silent. She sat there, playing with the edge of the epergne, at times pulling a petal from the thick bunch of violas which Mrs. Huncote had sent from Cannes. Roger was amiable that night; he tried to talk to her of the car they would buy a little later, of the violas, and didn't she think that the elusive violet had a more English grace? He tried her upon subjects more her own, the stateliness of Rhoda and the latest breakage of the increasingly athletic cat. But she did not respond. She sat there preoccupied, asking herself why there should persist in her a feeling of discomfort and regret. She was not hankering after Bert, of course not. But still, she felt she ought not to feel like this and was remorseful. It was not her fault; but still it didn't ought to have happened. Later in the evening she told Roger.

"Well," he said, "what about it?"

She wriggled. "Oh, I don't know — only it feels so queer after — after having known him so long."

"I understand," said Roger, "but that's all over."

"Yes, it's all over," said Sue, "only, you see, we being married, I can't help feeling that I oughtn't to."

"Oughtn't to what? There's no harm in your meeting him again."

This hurt her; it was not in accord with the proper jealousy of a married man.

"Well, if you don't mind," she said, "I don't. Only — you can call me a silly if you like, but when one's married one's married." She struggled with an emotion. "That's the difference between being married and not. It's — it's not having anything left for anybody else, don't you think?"

"Yes, I understand," said Roger, rather moved.

"And so, going back like that to — well, there never was anything in it — but still, you know, he — he was gone on me. So it seemed to me I oughtn't to — even shake hands because . . ." Then her eyes grew soft. "Well, there's only you now."

He got up and went around the table, put his arms round her shoulders and drew her close. He understood the straight, clean feeling which struggled to come forth from her like a clear spring through clay. As he kissed her she too flung her arms round him. But there was a difference in her caress; he was stirred with the most delicate emotion because he had conquered an entire faithfulness, because he was grateful, because for such delight he could in that minute overcome so many things that stung, forget so many fears. But she held him gripped more nervously, pressing her face against his until it hurt, as if she were less offering love than begging him to hold her closer, to protect her against the enfolding past, to weld for her a chain so close that never could she run out when beyond the past went piping.

Later in the evening, when they were ordinary again, she told him that she had asked Mrs. Groby to tea on Sunday.

"I hope you don't mind," she said.

"Mind?" he replied. "Why should I mind?"

She sat with downcast head.

"I ought to have asked you first."

"You haven't got to ask me," he said gently. "Do try and understand that you're quite free; you can do just what you like. Haven't you got that yet?"

"Yes," said Sue, but she meant "No."

Later, before he went to bed, he thought again of the little incident. It had been hard on her to meet Bert like that, so suddenly, though it did not matter so much as she thought: Roger Huncote was enough of a male egoist not to realise that Bert could matter now that he, Roger Huncote, had come. She had taken it too hard. Still, he must help her, even if she was too delicate, too sensitive. He must build her a present to blot out the past. He remembered that Mrs. Groby would come on Sunday. He did not think he could tackle Mrs. Groby alone with Sue. Whom could he ask? He could not ask anybody ordinary. And yet he must ask somebody. Well, he would ask Theresa; she wouldn't mind. After all, who cared? Before going to bed he went down to lock up. He had to turn out the lights in the drawing-room, for Sue had left them all on as she went to bed. She often did that, and it irritated him. He did not know why it irritated him; he only came near the edge of understanding that this waste of electric light meant exactly the same thing as the purchase of bad jam and cheap tumblers, that Sue was instinctively economical when she bought things that the poor bought, but that she was wasteful in things such as light, because those were things of the rich and had never meant anything to her. It was not clear, but somehow it was tragic.

VIII

Theresa kept Roger's letter until the last. She was an epicure in those things; she always looked first at

the circulars, the bills, and the letters in familiar handwritings, keeping for the last the adventure of the unknown hand. She hardly realised why Roger's letter should dominate even adventure. But after she had read it twice she lay back and for a while stayed thinking. It was so pitiful, so easy to understand. Roger was almost telling her,—or how otherwise could she understand that phrase: "I've got to ask somebody and somehow it's so difficult." He was almost telling her that he dared ask nobody but her. These people made loneliness round him. It was awful. And he knew, and the letter sounded almost as if he did not care, as if he had said to himself: "Good heavens! Let's settle down, and all that sort of thing, and be happy, and not think of it. It doesn't matter to Sirius." Tears filled her eyes as she thought of him like this, alone and beginning not to care, like Robinson Crusoe before Man Friday came. But Theresa was a woman as well as a friend, and she could not help thinking how happy Crusoe would be if only he knew there was a Man Friday in the world. He did not. There he was on his islands among the goats with nobody to talk to him.

"I could talk to him," she thought, and her eyes grew dim with the sweetness of that impossible conversation. She put the letter down, her unhappiness growing swiftly as the plant from the seed in the fakir's little plot. The blooms of pity were two, one for him, one for herself. His she saw as a big bloom of a mauve so pale that it was almost grey. Could this go on? Could he so remain divorced from his own people? Could he indefinitely dwell in St. Panwich tents because those of Kedar were closed to him? She thought of the dreadful things that might happen to him, a growing isolation, a shrinking from his own people, worse still, an enthusiastic adoption of another breed and its manners: unpressed trousers, pipes in the street, drink per-

haps; she shivered. She thought of a theosophical friend of hers who said: "It's a long way up the ray." Yes, and such a short way down. Then she thought of the ascending ray like a butter slide and laughed, for even when she was very unhappy Theresa could laugh at burlesque. But it did not last long: before her eyes was the other bloom of pity, mauve also; but she could not help being an egoist. Hers was not mauve turning to grey, like Roger's; hers was mauve turning to black. She knew just then how much he meant to her, how dear were to her his idealism, his unreasonable hopefulness, his youth. And for the terrible moment that comes to women now and then she wondered whether she loved his youth because hers was fleeting. But no, it was not youth she loved in him; it was just him she loved, and for the first time she told herself so quite simply. It was hopeless, it was a thing without a future, and yet it thrilled her; she held it to her just then as a mother holds a dying child; it must die, but still she can feel upon her breast its little weak hands. Something secret whispered to her: "Who knows? Perhaps it will not die?"

But the whisper was very feeble, drowned by the cry of pain which came out of that letter; she could hardly hear the whisper now. She could hear only that cry, blending with the sobs of youth within her: "Oh, I'm dying while you wait. Help me as you want to help him, or it's going to be too late."

Elizabeth came in. She found her mistress lying upon her face, hugging the pillow, her shoulders going up and down rhythmically, without a sound. Elizabeth was old and short-sighted, so she said: "Your bath's getting cold," and did not at once understand why Theresa did not reply. Only a little later did she notice the rhythmic rise and fall of the slim shoulders and the struggle of the hands upon the pillow, determined that nobody should see the tears.

IX

They were waiting in the drawing-room for Mrs. Groby. She came. But not alone, for she had brought her husband, Perce, Muriel, and a friend, a hoarse and perspiring female with a large bust and a small baby. The more the merrier.

Mrs. Groby felt quite comfortable, for by now she was quite used to Pembroke Square. As for Muriel, she understood that one had to be much richer to live at "The Cedars", in Highbury, than here, and so she was prepared to make allowances. As for Perce, the responsibility of the stamp-book had greatly increased his coolness, together with the familiarity bred in the City of acquaintance with large cheques; he told them about that very soon. Perce had everything, his own way, as Sue was paralysed by the situation. If it had not been for Theresa, Roger would have felt it necessary to seize his father-in-law and Perce, take them down-stairs and make them drink while Sue managed the two women. But Theresa seemed strangely undismayed. She asked the baby's name, she poked it in the side and made it gurgle, while its mother perspired with delight. Simultaneously she engaged Mrs. Groby, leaving Sue free to ask Perce the questions he wanted to be asked.

Huncote felt better; he had to entertain only Mr. Groby, and this was quite easy: if the public houses had on Sundays closed at four instead of three, it might have perhaps been less easy but, as it happened, Mr. Groby was just about friendly, though there was something rather penetrating about his breath. Naturally they drifted into politics; Mr. Groby was a strong Conservative, but most of his political opinions had been melted down into a protest: ninepence for fourpence. Roger was not greatly in love with the Insurance Act, but he found himself defending it with a vigour that

would have made Mr. Masterman envious. Strong in his slum experience he pulverised Mr. Groby's points as to the cheapness of doctors, though he had failed so to deal with Sue. But then Mr. Groby was a man and tried to argue logically, which served him ill. Also he had to struggle with a tendency to call Roger, Sir, and that got in his way. They managed very amiably, those two. He could hear Perce talking to Sue:

"They ain't 'arf rich. My word, you should see the cheques. There was one for a hundred and two pounds the other day."

"My!" said Sue admiringly.

"An' wot's more, I 'ad to take it to the bank." Perce swelled. "They got to trust a man, you know. One's got to check off with the cashier too, and wouldn't one catch it if one made a mistake! But that's all right," he added consolingly. "I felt a bit shaky about it in the beginning," he conceded, "but one soon gets used to business. Not like some fellers. There's the junior clerk, as they call 'im, 'e can't add up for little apples . . ."

Huncote and his father-in-law had slowly diverged from insurance into unemployment, thence into metal and railway work, and were now discussing the record runs of railways. Mr. Groby was very learned as to the performances of the Great Northern and the Great Western which he insisted on making picturesque by continual references to the Exeter Mail and the Flying Scotchman.

"Fifty-seven mile in the hour! Tell yer wot, it opens yer eyes t' think o' that, an' a 'undred an' two miles without a stop. They can't do that in Germany, can they?"

He was corrected as to a non-stop run by Roger, whom this topic left languid. But Mr. Groby was not languid; he was evidently prepared to pass hours discussing railway runs, weights of engines, heights of

bridges. Indeed the whole of that afternoon was punctuated, whenever Roger talked to anybody else, by rumbling references to the length of tunnels and the depth of cuttings. An interval a little later was filled in with fire brigades.

He kept away from the women, but they tended to cluster and to talk loudly. The conversation was not obstetric, in deference, presumably, to Theresa's virginal state, but the hoarse mother had details to confide, mainly medical. Roger could hear her from time to time:

"... so I stopped the gravy beef as Mrs. Bubwith give me as the doctor said it didn't oughter 'ave meat. I just give 'im a drop o' milk with a pinch of citrate of soda."

"And did that stop it?" asked Theresa.

"No," said the hoarse woman. "I didn't find out that Ethel, that's my eldest, give 'im a bit o' kipper at tea." Resentful. "I didn't 'arf walk into 'er."

Mrs. Groby contributed reminiscences of the feeding of children; Sue was excluded as unpractical. The last Roger heard of this particular conversation was a difference of opinion as to binders, whatever those were. Now Mr. Groby entangled him into a story less lucid than the statistics of railways. It was a story, well, something like this:

"Wot I was tellin' yer was 'ow 'e lost 'is job; 'e was my mate, 'e was. It was all along the foreman, yer see. Red 'aired, 'e was, an' me ole mother used t' say, 'Charlie,' she used t' say, 'never you trust a red 'aired man ...'"

"... gettin' thinner and thinner," said the hoarse woman gloomily, as she turned the baby over on her lap and pulled up its drawers as high as they would go. "Doctor says 'e's always s'prised to find 'im alive."

Mrs. Groby grew comforting.

"W'ile there's life, there's 'ope."

"So the foreman says to 'im: 'You marked the sheet at ten forty,' 'e says. 'That's a lie,' my mate says. 'I ort t' mark it ten twenty by right,' 'e says; 'I let the firm off twenty minutes cos it's my birthday.' The foreman, 'e didn't say nothin', and then my mate, 'e trusted 'im, 'e did. An' as I was tellin' you, my old mother, she used ter say, 'Charlie,' she used to say, 'never you trust' . . ."

The story grew and became more and more confused. Theresa and Mrs. Groby had now come to a sharp difference of opinion because Theresa thought the baby too young to have gravy beef at all, doctor or no doctor. The difference grew acute, Mrs. Groby feeling that as Sue had been given bacon at the age of eight months and there she was, "look at the girl, it ain't done 'er no 'arm," there could be nothing against gravy beef. The hoarse woman was delighted with the wrangle and fanned its flame. She remarked: "Go on, I'll 'old yer 'ats."

And so the afternoon wore on, peaceable and quarrelsome, somewhat discursive. Tea came and was drunk. Then the Grobys declared that they must go and did not go. They did not know how to do it and for half an hour explained how sorry they were that they could not stay. Muriel had taken very little interest in the conversation; she had looked at the pictures, examined the books with a critical air. Theresa worked splendidly. As they did not go she tried to amuse them while they stayed. The new photographs of Roger were handed round and freely criticised. There was coldness between Sue and Perce from that time on, for he was heard to remark, not quite *sotto voce*, that they must have been selling off when Roger got his face. Mrs. Groby grew conscious of a certain tension in the air and waxed enthusiastic over the photograph.

"You mustn't mind wot we says, Roger. A photo's

made to be shown and, as the sayin' goes, you should let others judge you."

It was nearly seven o'clock. Mrs. Groby said: "'Ow time flies!"

X

They could not blend, those two. Body and spirit were of different essences; he was as foreign to her as she was to him. They were in the lists of love, like champions of two classes. He began to realise it. Sue was of a class that is interested in the price of things and in material things, in what it can see rather than in what it can dream, in the scenery and the actor rather than in the play, in the building rather than in its grace, in big things like cathedrals, town halls, because they are big and particularly if they are new unless, of course, they are extremely old, which is as good. He began to understand their elementary ideas of beauty, their crude idealism; as he suspected this he began to despise them. And yet, and yet, a feeling still clung to him that though crude this idealism was much more vigorous than his own made by culture fastidious and a little pale.

Only there it was, there they were, ready to allow for each other, unable to do so. One morning, as a surprise, Sue appeared in a frock of her own ordering. Nine o'clock and she stood in a mixture of silk and velvet, with a bow where there was not a bit of lace, and a ruffle where there was no tuck. A frock of defiance, unsupervised by Theresa, by the dangerous Theresa who liked Roger too well, by the supercilious Theresa who knew too much. This was Sue's own frock, her own idea, her own desire to rebel against the other woman and by herself to delight her own man. It was mainly green because that was Sue's idea of what a dark beauty ought to wear. That night as

Roger lay awake he thought of Sue. He had not discussed dress with her; he seldom discussed anything with her now, not having anything to say, and he had begun to understand that she too felt she had nothing to say to him. They married, thinking that between them were tastes and thoughts when there were only caresses.

"What shall we do?" he said. Then he thought: "We can't go on like this. It's my fault, I thought she'd tumble to things. I have not educated her enough. I must go on."

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

SCENT OF DEAD JONQUILS

I

ROGER HUNCOTE walked up and down in the Settlement attic. He liked to go there now and then to think, for he was one of those whom the streets disturb and yet who cannot think well in a park or in the country. People, birds, the blowing wind, everything disturbed him. He needed walls to cabin his thought. He liked the false atmosphere of the attic, the contrast its heap of stage props made with the free view of London through the dirty window. And there was room to walk up and down. He had been there a long time, thinking of a little incident that afternoon. He had been out with Sue after lunch; they had had tea in the Gardens, and when they arrived at Pembroke Square he found that he had forgotten his latch-key.

"Got your key?" he said to Sue.

But as he spoke Sue raised the knocker and gave it a sharp rat-rat. He was vaguely discomfited, but he was thinking of something else, and only a moment later, as the knock was not answered, did he say: "Ring the bell."

Rhoda came to the door; she seemed a little startled and apologetic: "Beg pardon, Ma'am — I thought . . ."

Rhoda became an eloquent mass of suppressions. And quite suddenly Roger's mind was illumined by her implication. Of course Rhoda had thought it was the postman, or a parcel, or something. A hot little

rage seized him, and he found himself too lucid. After all these months Sue was not yet using her key or the bell. He knew her, for he knew her people too well; he knew those tenements in St. Panwich where there are no keys and no bells because the house cannot be left, because a child or the mother is always at home, because staying at home is accounted a sort of virtue. It sickened him.

Now in the attic it struck him that what was worse than that it should sicken him was that nine months ago it would have made him smile. Falling leaves! He was reminded of a tree in the autumn that sheds upon the wind dry golden corpses that once were green. It shocked him.

"This won't do," he thought. "I really must try."

He looked about him interestedly, at the cases which he knew contained spare pamphlets and books, at half a Roman portico and a clump of cloth palm trees held up by broomsticks. "I must try," he thought, and instinctively went to the window to look out over the city. There she lay, London, this early July day, gilt and warm, with her thousand roofs, so close, so strong that they seemed eternal, with her many spires raising up towards the pale heaven her ever-renascent hope. He loved her as she clustered between her hills. He loved her silver girdle, the Thames; which he could just see beyond the slope of the Strand. He could feel the spirit of the city that every day lifts those whom it elects from Whitechapel to Park Lane, that spirit, truest of democrats, that rates not a man by his achievement but yet his son by his father's achievement. He laughed: the spirit of London town, was it not after all, when you thought of the sleepy, obstinate spirit of the country, was it not the spirit of social promotion?

He sat down upon a case.

"Well, what shall I do?" And, of course, at once he thought of pictures. Of literature a little later,

and even then music had come before. For Roger Huncote, with all his intelligence and his delicacy, was of his period, of a time when men thought that artistic culture was the root of refinement. He had been to Oxford, which was just a little more than having been to the Polytechnic. His parents gave him a first-class education and he never got over it. He thought of Sue understanding the arts as he did, of Sue so developed as to tell at sight a Rembrandt from a Maude Goodman. She would be more like him then, he told himself in innocent priggishness, and he could love her again. He wanted her to be like him: that was a trace of the divine egotism in virtue of which God made man in His own image.

He thought of the dress too, that morning's dress, green silk and green velvet. He must not suffer again like that. He felt quite sorry for himself for having to stand that. But what should he do? Could he help her to dress? Theresa? Well, of course, there was Theresa, but something new in him shrank; he did not want to drag Theresa into it any more. He did not tell himself that, for he was like most men, unable to take a decision without deceiving himself first, without assuming a righteous motive. "No," he thought proudly, "I must do it myself." At once he thought of blue coats and skirts. It was a great relief to think of that, and he had a vision of Sue always trim in blue coats and skirts with — with — well, what did they call that white thing women wore under the coat, a thing with a low neck? And patent leather boots, of course. It sounded a little hot for summer, and he vaguely remembered having seen Theresa in something made of linen, something claret-coloured, but it looked rather crumpled, and he vaguely hated her that day. "Still," he thought grudgingly, "she must have linen for the summer." And now he had a vision of Sue, looking very fresh, all in white drill, with white shoes,

and no bangles. It did not strike him to wonder whether that stuff would crumple. He was a man. He saw his wife as a fashion plate.

Also she must speak differently. True, she had improved a good deal, but — a governess, just for an hour in the mornings. Sue was no longer referring to “them things”, but every now and then, when the cockney crept out and she said “haouse” or “naow”, he suffered. He would take her to the National Gallery. Well, perhaps not at once. They might go to the Tate first. She would like the Tate, and it would lead her upwards. He thought it could hardly lead her any way but upwards if he remembered the Tate. And a concert or two, not too classical. She must read a bit too. Now he thought of it, she never seemed to read anything; she only looked at the pictures in the paper. They ought to read together, it would do him good as well as her. Verse, for instance; they might begin with Tennyson and then by degrees get on to poetry. He felt quite inflamed and nearly fell in love again with the ascending Sue . . .

It proved quite easy, that governess business. Sue merely said: “I know I don’t talk properly.” He tried to cloak it by telling her that the governess would read with her. But Sue was still humble, she wanted to learn. And it was rather fun getting the governess from a place in Margaret Street where apparently they would supply him with a governess, or a chief eunuch, or any other domestic. It made him feel very grown up, as if he had been long married and were providing for his nursery. After all he had a child in the nursery, he thought, and for a moment felt fond, then doubtful, and his fondness vanished. Miss Ponkey, when she came, which she now did every morning for an hour after Ethel had told Sue what to order, clearly considered that she was accessory to hushing up a court scandal, a *mésalliance* in high life. She got on very

well with Sue, for her attitude to high life, as represented by *The Morning Post*, one day late, which her mother, the vicarress, sent her every day from Hertfordshire, corresponded exactly with that of Sue as represented by the novelettes. Roger had never seen her reading those; he thought he knew all her secrets, but there were scores of novelettes in an old hat box, and one of them, *Sir Lucius and His Love*, had been wept upon once or twice. Or perhaps the stains were butter. Roger felt better when Miss Ponkey took over the responsibility for Sue's rise in life. She was so comforting.

"You see," said Roger airily, "she's met very few people . . . living in the colonies . . ."

"I quite understand," said Miss Ponkey.

"She's been isolated," he went on. "And one does pick things up from the servants."

"I quite understand," said Miss Ponkey.

To the very end of their intercourse Roger never obtained from Miss Ponkey more than that she quite understood. He violently hoped that she did not.

But still there was to be chaos in his mind that night, for Miss Ponkey had not yet been sought and found. It was a mythical Miss Ponkey filled his mind. Now he had to go down, for at seven o'clock, that hour so cunningly calculated for meetings as to prevent one from having dinner, he must sit on the platform while a Labour Member discoursed upon nature study and the democracy.

It seemed strange, for he had been very little at the Settlement of late months. Churton was still there; so was Platt, a little worn because the dissolution had not yet happened. Mrs. Ramsey had shifted some of her interest in the white slave traffic on to the enquiries as to 606 which had just made the Medical Congress into a society function; Miss Miskin was no longer Miss Miskin, for she had married a poet of nineteen

who often came to the Settlement and recited to St. Panwich sonnets about golden galleons and pomegranates.

The Labour Member was not very interesting. He was one of the now defunct Liblabs, anxious to be a gentleman among labour men and a workingman in the House of Commons. He quoted abundantly of course Thoreau, Richard Jefferies, Gilbert White. There was an excursus upon gardening. But gardening fatally led him into sociological byways, for as St. Panwich shifted its feet and coughed, the Liblab found himself drawn to the allotments on waste lands in London destined for the deserving poor and perhaps for the others. The land question hovered, then settled; it burgeoned into housing, into drink. The country side was abashed. By swifter and swifter transitions the Liblab fastened upon class contrasts, the essence of class.

"I'm not one of those socialists," he went on, with a determined air of trying to get a laugh. "I don't want to do away with classes. I only want to make them fluid." He grew benignant. "Man is not evil, it's society makes him so. One only has to know one another to see one another's good points. I always tell the wife that, when she complains of the neighbours. But classes want a bit of mixing. They only want doing away with the water-tight doors between their respective spheres. When I'm Prime Minister there shall be scholarships to allow all nice working-girls to marry Piccadilly Johnnies (Laughter). They aren't so bad, the Piccadilly Johnnies, and if they had nice sensible girls . . ."

He suddenly perceived Huncote who sat six feet off with a burning blush upon his face. He paused. The Liblab had been at the Settlement before, and he remembered something. He went on talking about mixing the classes and, being a practised Member of Parliament, did not have to think of what he was

saying. Suddenly he remembered the story. Of course that was the man; Huncote, yes, that was he. His heart swelled; what an oratorical chance! Suddenly the M.P. seemed to grow larger. With a coronating sweep of the arm he pointed to Huncote and shouted:

"And what better evidence d'you want than the case which is in your midst?"

Huncote shrank; he felt he was the case and yet could not run away. He was paralysed.

"Here you have among you a young man, nurtured in one of our most ancient universities. A young man, respected and honoured of all who know him in St. Panwich . . ." There was a little cheering and clapping from the front ranks who understood the connection between this and Huncote.

"This young man did not seek a bride in Mayfair. No, Mr. Huncote, if I may name him" (abundant applause), "grew aware of the necessity for the reunion of the classes. This young man towards whom I point" (and he did point) "wedded a daughter of the people." Huncote leaped up and tumbled rather than jumped from the platform. But as he went, head down, eyes half-shut, the outstretched arm of the M.P. still followed him, holding out a wreath of laurel, speeding his flight with these words: "Mr. Huncote is one of the men of whom we want more."

That evening, much later, when he had drunk more than usual to try and forget, he had a hateful little row with Sue. She had been to the gas company to complain about the gas-ring in his bedroom on which he heated milk when he came home very late. He went into her bedroom to tell her it still did not work and to ask whether she had gone around to the company.

"I did go," said Sue reluctantly. "But I forgot the address, and so when I nearly got there I couldn't find the place. It was too late to go back."

"Couldn't find the address?" said Roger. "But why didn't you look into the telephone book?"

"I didn't want to telephone," said Sue.

"I don't mean that," he said acidly. "I mean why didn't you look in the telephone book and go to the address it gave?"

She looked at him, still blank. "But if I'd gone home to look into the telephone book I might as well have got the address off their bill?"

He felt a rage rise in him.

"Didn't it strike you to go into a shop or a call-office and look at the book?"

"Well," said Sue, defensive, "how was I to know they were on the telephone?"

He did not reply. It would have been impossibly snobbish to tell her that in her new world everybody she could possibly want, whether public or private, would be on the telephone. He did not think he could explain that. As he went to sleep he thought again of this mixing of the classes. Oil and water, the Liblab had called them. Yes, you could mix them by shaking them up together, hard, and nobody knew what the oil and water felt about that. But how quickly they separated when you no longer shook them.

II

Yes, he had relied too much upon environment. He had not been precise enough, and rather bitterly he wondered whether he would feel as he did if Miss Ponkey and all that she implied had come nine months ago. But he knew he must look forward, not backwards. That though it might seem too late it might not be too late. At the same time he knew that his store of patience was small. He thought of the dress, of the difficulty with the knocker, of the difficulty with the gas company; he dug up from his memory these cruel trifles,

tumblers, jam, the wearing of jewellery, little things that strike so much deeper than the worship of a different god. He was beginning to wonder whether he could stick it, whether indeed he could remain one of the men of whom we want more.

He could, it seemed. One afternoon, a little later, pursuing the plan made in the attic, they went to the Tate Gallery. It was a soft, filmy day, and the Thames outside criticised the Turners. Sue went by his side respectfully, a little awed because they had made her leave her parasol, a ceremonial thing to do. For some time they wandered in the Gallery, while Huncote forgot that he was educating his wife. He had not been to the Tate for five or six years, and it was queer to recognise so many pictures from picture postcards, Christmas annuals, or "The Hundred Best Pictures For A Workingman." He recognised "The Doctor" and "Derby Day." Why! It was like going to one of Shakespeare's plays and discovering that it was made up entirely of quotations. He grew dubious too, for his taste was maturer than it had been five years before, and he began to wonder whether an afternoon at the Tate was educational or degrading. Still, you must crawl before you run,—all that sort of thing.

They stopped before a picture of three little children dancing. They looked like boiled veal.

"They're having a good time," said Sue.

He did not reply, and she felt she had said the wrong thing. She wished she had asked Miss Ponkey what to say when you looked at a picture. She felt that "oo" or "very nice" was inadequate. So she said nothing when she was dragged from Turner to Turner and told that a vision of Venice might be seen on Millbank by an artist's eye. Indeed Roger went on for a long time, trying to place Turner, which he found difficult; he could not help being pleased by the flaming opals of the man's work, and yet he suspected the brilliant mists

that Turner saw at the Nore of being a trick, a clever discovery, a sort of American stunt. When he had done with his criticism and tried to make Sue remember the "Nocturne of Battersea Bridge" and make her say that Whistler was rather like Turner, she remarked:

"Why are they so shiny?"

This did not exasperate him as much as it ought to have, for he was able to explain the changes that had come about in glazing since the sixteenth century, to talk of painting upon the white as opposed to direct laying on. And so they wandered on, she very respectful, a little bored but expecting only to be bored because this in a way was lessons. He tried to detain her before a nude, but she turned away with a scarlet face. Well, it was a very nude nude, Leighton's. It embarrassed Sue horribly. It was all very well for Roger to call it the bath of Sikey, but it looked like a lady taking off her chemise, and she did not think it nice. He teased her about it until she turned.

"You wouldn't like me photographed in my bath, would you?"

He found that difficult to answer and was driven into saying he would be quite willing to hang a nude picture of her in the drawing-room if it was beautiful, which he did not mean at all. Then he grew angry with her because she had made him say something he did not mean. And he felt priggish and superior.

They went on from picture to picture, Sue remarking at intervals that one might think they were walking out of the frame. She developed enthusiasm for the portrait of a hot ham, one of those steaming hams whose influence, together with that of cabbage, can never be restricted to the kitchen. He tried to drag her away, but she was enthralled.

"My!" she said, "it makes you feel quite hungry."

For a moment he was hopeful: after all that was not quite pictorial emotion, but he was furnishing her mind,

he must not forget that. So he made her repeat a few names: "The Doctor", by Luke Fildes, "Derby Day", by Frith. He even tried to lodge the names of Adrian Stokes and of Robert Brough in her mind. She was obedient. From time to time as the afternoon went on he caught a murmur behind him: "'The Doctor' by Frith, 'Derby Day' by Robert Brough . . ."

These good intentions were maddening. He could not keep her away from details. In a large scene it seemed impossible to make her see more than one character in a corner, who was pouring out wine as like as life. "The Death of Chatterton" was obviously to her a bit of cinema.

"My! he's poisoned himself," she remarked, in a whisper. He was saddened less by Sue perhaps than by this environing atmosphere of mediocrity, of obviousness,—a whole crowd of painters who, it seemed, most of their lives had crawled upon the earth like worms, never having the decency to get underground. True, there was the Stokes "Autumn Evening", fading light and dying brilliance, night wedded with the day that tarried on the striated white slopes. Yes, just a few, but how dreadful to feel it was almost accident. He grew bitter and thought: Sometimes the good Chantrey nods.

They were tired, they felt dusty. The air had that sharp, resounding feel which it always has in picture galleries. They dragged their feet as if they felt that picture galleries have the hardest floors in the world. They had nearly gone round when they got to "King Cophetua And The Beggarmaid." Without knowing why, they stood there for a long time, touched perhaps by the romance of it, the girl with her frightened eyes incredulous, and the warrior king abased, humble and transfigured with his doffed crown. He told her the story, quoting the lines from *Romeo and Juliet*: "Young Adam Cupid, he that shot so trim, When King

372 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

Cophetua loved the beggar maid." He told her the story, and just at the very end, while she stood listening to his words that grew romantic, while she sought to improve her mind, he suddenly saw an application. "I'm Cophetua," he thought. For a moment the knowledge was intoxicating. He felt uplifted by the doffing of his crown. For a fleeting second he understood the pride that lies in Christian humility.

"And what happened next?" asked Sue.

"Well," said Roger, "they got married."

"Oh, yes," said Sue. "Wonder how they got on?"

It hurt him, that question, though Sue did not apply the situation to herself. It was a bitterly amusing idea anyhow. All these matches of romance, how did they work? Did Pygmalion ever quarrel with Galatea when he got a bill:

Dr. Pygmalion Esq.:

1 chiton	200 drachma.
1 himation (Mitylene model) ...	400 drachma.

He thought of Romeo and Juliet too. Had they lived and married he could foresee that with tempers such as theirs there were endless possibilities. Notably the Capulets and the Montagues would have been the most troublesome relations-in-law you could imagine.

They went out. For a moment in the hall they paused where in a basin the live goldfish go around and around, processional, patient and eternal.

"Those fish have a dull life," said Sue.

He did not reply. He was thinking that anyhow they were alive. He saw the sun shine through their undulating fins. It thrilled him after so much dead paint.

He wondered a little later how much he had drawn from this visit, from others which he forced upon her to the National Gallery, to Dulwich. He even took her to the Soane Museum and tried to make her like

the Hogarths, which she thought very coarse. There was music too, a few concerts of the lighter kind which admitted "Carmen" and even "Pomp and Circumstance." She liked these, for she could catch the tune and soon maddened him by humming "Habanera" all over the house. But resolutely he administered "1812", and, by means of a violinist, Ernst's "Airs Russes." She went on gloomily, resignedly. One's got to know these things when one's a lady, not dropping one's h's, talking about Shakespeare, having one's boots made for one, and there you were. She quoted to herself from the posters: "It's so simple." And yet she was unhappy sometimes, for she felt that she had said the wrong thing. She never managed to say what she felt. She was always saying what she thought she ought, and she always thought wrong. When she felt at all she always felt right, but that she could not tell. One afternoon, when they were having tea at the Carlton, she was moved almost to tears by an arrangement from "La Bohème." She wondered why Roger got so angry and said that Puccini's music embodied the passions of a literary hairdresser. Still, she supposed one did get blown up now and then when one was being educated.

III

"But still," said Roger, "I don't understand why you didn't have him arrested."

Sue looked mutinous and went on making bread pills.

"There wasn't much in the bag," she said.

"That's not what I'm asking you; you tell me this man snatched your bag outside Barker's, and you did nothing?"

"He ran away," said Sue.

"But you said he didn't run very fast, owing to the crowd."

374 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

No reply. Roger was interested as well as irritated. He persisted.

"There was a policeman near, you say?"

"Oh, well, perhaps the poor man needed the money," said Sue.

"Very likely; still, I won't lecture you about the right to steal. Was that why you let him off?"

She made an effort to tell a lie and with her usual incapacity failed.

"Makes a lot of trouble," she said shortly.

"Trouble? What trouble?"

"You've got to go to the police court and, there's no knowing, you might get into the papers. They photograph you, they do."

Roger felt dense.

"But whatever does that matter? You've done nothing wrong!"

"Makes a lot of trouble," Sue replied, with an air of elucidation. Then, feeling this inadequate, she said: "My mother . . ." She paused, and Roger had a second of satisfaction: Miss Ponkey had expelled "Ma" and substituted "My mother."

"Well?"

"My mother always says, whatever you do, whatever happens, don't get into the papers."

Huncote thought this over for some time. It was very curious.

He understood in a vague way. He had heard something like this before in St. Panwich. Yes, they did think it was disgraceful to get into the newspapers. Why? he wondered. Was it that they were never quite sure who was witness and who was prisoner? Or just that they had a sort of animal fear of being watched by the powerful lest the powerful should do them some harm? Rabbits run to earth. A humorous idea struck him.

"Oh!" he said. "I see. But lots of people don't

mind getting into the papers. Look at the breach of promise cases."

"That's different," said Sue. "One has one's rights."

"But surely you've as much right to your bag as to a promised husband? More, in fact. A bag's more permanent."

"It's different," said Sue. "When a girl's been made a fool of, don't you think she wants everybody down her way to know she's had her rights?"

He laughed. "Oh! A sort of warning to the next?"

"How can you?" said Sue. She looked rather offended: one might make jokes about marriage but not about proper pride.

He stuck to his point.

"And I s'pose that the published damages also serve as an advertisement for Number 2?"

"I think you're horrid," said Sue. But she smiled.

It was only later, as he thought again, that this strange inconsistency struck him. One might not go into court to prosecute a thief but one might prosecute a lover. Was that because in the first case one had had something taken from one and in the second had graciously given it? Or some other obscure motive? Or was it more simple, that damages could vanquish the reluctance of the rabbits to come out and be seen? Probably. Probably too the whole thing rested on a deep distrust of print, print that represents the demand note for rates, the summons, all sorts of uncomfortable things. He did not like it: this was not reserve, it was the fear of the savage. For a moment he wondered whether, paradox or not, there was not more refinement in the actresses who allowed themselves to be photographed to advertise a dentifrice.

He thought of this reserve later that evening, though they had set it aside to read poetry. He had hesitated

a good deal; he did not know how to begin. He believed that in the people's heart slumbered a great desire for melody, and it would be a pity to read the wrong things. Cadoresse had spoken to him about that at the Settlement, when he hung about electioneering. He remembered that the Frenchman had said that one could always work on women with a bit of poetry if other methods failed. Cadoresse had even quoted some poetry which, he said, he found most efficacious, but it was not the sort of poetry Huncote liked. He vaguely remembered that it was rather voluptuous, and he did not possess that gilt French voice. So he thought he had better please himself.

You will figure them in the drawing-room on a hot July night. Sue is sitting upon the sofa, very dark against the gay chintzes. She cannot be seen very well, for there is little light save from the moon that makes a broad, pale bar across the carpet. At only one point is the light bright, by a shaded lamp. In its little golden sun hangs Roger's head, very black against the light, its profile determined and fine, eyes bent upon the book, half conscious of the sturdy figure that dutifully listens as it plays with its fingers. He reads — Blake:

“ . . . On the shadows of the moon,
Climbing thro' Night's highest noon:
In Time's ocean falling, drown'd:
In aged ignorance profound,
Holy and cold, I clipp'd the wings
Of all sublunary things,
And in the depths of my dungeons
Closed the father and the sons. . . ”

She listened dutifully to that poem. Words hurtled in her head,—“mandrake” and a funnier one still, “herfamodite.” While she wondered who or what was in the depths of dungeons she was still oppressed by the beginning of the poem. She could not see that a caterpillar on a leaf could remind anybody of a mother's

grief. It lasted such a long time; Roger went on reading, intoxicating himself with the vision of horror and holies, with the dream stuff of the phrases. He was all thrilled and hot, for in Blake he could always glimpse heaven and hell combatant, as Blake may have glimpsed them through a glass darkly, as Verlaine, through a green mist of absinthe, as Francis Thompson, with a brain excited and entrails twisting in starvation. He read for a long time; he quite forgot her. Rising and falling with the rhythm he dragged his pupil through tales of harlots who once were virgins, to the gate of pearl and gold, through the pageant of azure-winged angels, ecstatic suns, stars blinded with their own radiance. Accidentally he read her the poem "To the Jews", and as he read came closer to earth. It was amusing, this song of London boroughs. He stopped a little before the end. "D'you like it?" he asked suddenly.

Sue did not reply. She remembered two extraordinary lines:

"... What are those golden builders doing
Near mournful ever-weeping Paddington. . . ."

This sounded familiar but queer. She had a dim idea that they might be extending Paddington Station, but fortunately dared not say so; indeed she had no need to comment, for her husband remarked:

"H'm, perhaps that's hardly what I ought to read to you, though, of course, you feel the rhythm, the music, don't you?"

"Oo, yes," said Sue, "only I don't understand always."

"No," he said, "many of us don't. You might as well ask to understand the mystery of life and death. It's just an emotion. But I oughtn't to have read you that, I think. Now what ought I to read you?" He picked up the Oxford Book of Verse, opened it at ran-

dom. "Poe, yes, Poe. Oh, bother! They haven't put 'The Raven' in, still . . ." He read her "Annabel Lee." Sue felt much comforted; she liked the jingle. She was a little barbaric; she would have liked Indian music on the tomtoms. He read on:

" . . . For the moon never beams without bringing me dreams
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,
In the sepulchre there by the sea,
In her tomb by the sounding sea."

He looked up; there were tears in her eyes. She said:
"Read it again, not all, just that last bit."

Thrilled by the love cry he shrank a little as she said "the last bit", but still he read, and when he looked up, "in her tomb by the sounding sea" still echoing in his ears, he saw that her eyes were wet. His heart grew big and heavy with hope. He was excited, he wanted to read more poetry, he wanted to please her more, to do more than bring tears to her eyes. And so he grew cunning, he searched the book. A few pages further was Tennyson. He knew she would like Tennyson. Had she not at once picked up: "'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all?" He opened the selected Tennyson at random, as he did not find what he wanted in the Oxford Book. He chanced upon the poem "To The Queen." He read on for a while, but it felt so dull. He stopped at the lines:

" . . . And statesmen at her council met
Who knew the seasons, when to take
Occasion by the hand, and make
The bounds of freedom wider yet. . . ."

He suddenly felt that this was not enough; he must force her to be articulate.

"Sue," he said, "what does all that make you think of?"

She seemed startled. If he was going to question her, well. "Oo," she said, "I don't know. Solemn."

"That's not bad," said Roger encouragingly. "This is not the first bit of Tennyson I've read you." (And he did not notice that he had said "a bit of Tennyson" while he shrank when she said "a bit of Poe.") "That's not bad; what does it make you think of?"

Sue tried very hard, then said: "I hardly know. Funny sort of big place."

"Big place? What sort of place?"

"I d'know; well, something like the town hall at St. Panwich, with the red plush and the chandeliers."

He stared at her. "Sue," he said, "what's happened to you? You've criticised England between 1850 and the Jubilee of 1887."

She did not reply. He did not press his advantage. He wondered whether this was a fluke. Well, he would see, and he read on. He read her "The Lady of Shalott" after explaining briefly who were Lancelot and Galahad. She seemed unmoved, and "Mariana" merely caused her to ask why in poetry people were always wishing they were dead. He knew there was a certain amount of reason in that complaint, and when he tried to explain he discovered how difficult it might be to explain anything. She had already been troublesome when he read "To Anthea" and tried to guess at what Herrick meant by:

"... Bid me to live, and I will live
Thy Protestant to be. . . ."

She was liking Tennyson though so much that she insisted upon trying to learn by heart:

"Come into the garden, Maud,
For the black bat, Night, has flown,
Come into the garden, Maud,

I am here at the gate alone;
 And the woodbine spices are wafted abroad,
 And the musk of the roses blown. . . ."

As the evening waned, he grew more venturesome. He dipped into Swinburne, into Whitman. But he felt she did not like them, especially Whitman. Swoons in poppy beds and women with giant breasts — well, it was not quite proper.

"Sue," he asked, at last, "is this the first time you've ever read any poetry or had any read to you?"

"You seem to think I don't know anything," she said, rather touchily. "A lady came along years ago, and she gave me something by — I don't quite remember the name, I think it's Eliza Wilcox. I always did like poetry, especially the funny kind."

"Funny?" asked Roger. He reflected that humorous verse was not so common.

"Yes," she said, "there was a very funny one I heard once at a social. I learnt it by heart."

"D'you remember it?" asked Roger, curious.

"Not much of it," said Sue. "It was called 'The Wreck of the Raspberry Jam.' Here's a bit I remember:

"One chap was discoursing on Darwin, and said:
 'The professor was right through and through.
 We *did* spring from monkeys.' Another one said:
 'I believe it when I look at *you*.'"

She stopped. "There's some more, but I've forgotten it."

"Oh," said Roger, "it doesn't matter."

She looked at him quickly: "You don't like it?"

"Well," he began, attempting indulgence, "it's hardly —" His attempt failed. "After what we've been reading to-night — Oh, Sue, it's dreadful, dreadful. Oh, Sue, don't you understand? This sort of stuff — Oh, I don't want to be superior. Only — that

tit for tat, that sort of cheap answer. It's vulgar, it's cockney. Oh, Sue, this is dreadful, dreadful!"

"I don't see anything dreadful in it."

Roger made a despairing sound. Sue was hurt, so his dejection angered her. She hated him just then as one hates a dog upon whose paw one has trodden. She was vicious:

"Tell you what, it's a good deal more decent than the broad-breasted what you call it you were reading about."

"Whitman," said Roger gloomily.

"If you ask me, I call it horrid," said Sue.

"I didn't ask you," he snarled.

At once he felt abased. A cockney answer from him! This was contagious. It was not enough that she should have sold him short-weight happiness; now she was going to degrade him in his own eyes. For a moment he thought of her as a vampire flourishing as he withered. That gave him a thrill of martyrdom. But he was too young to be a martyr; he was still a lover, he wanted to take, not give. And here was Sue picking up his phrase.

"Only thought you'd like to know."

And he actually replied:

"Thank you for nothing."

And she automatically said: "Don't thank me."

And he thought: "It's a longish way from St. Panwich to Pembroke Square, but it seems shorter the other way about."

He leapt to his feet; he felt the need for activity. He switched on the light. For a moment they remained standing before each other, silent and inimical. It was not that they had differed about poetry; it was worse. It was that they found themselves entirely parted by their tastes. And one could not average, one could not compromise between Herrick and "The Wreck of the Raspberry Jam." It seemed horribly serious to him

who thought that literature must march with love; serious to her who in a difference of opinion perceived assumption of superiority. He was superior; she liked to think that, but he must not make her feel it. She wanted to be the eternal female, following her man and pretending that she led him.

"Good night," she said suddenly.

He heard her run up-stairs. It was less than a minute before eleven, and he watched the long hand of the clock travel; it went so slowly. Now that Sue had gone the place looked so queer, so unlike a battlefield, with its bright chintzes, its pastoral prints upon the blue and white paper. The faded peace of the transported eighteenth century was about him. But in him no peace. No anger now, but an immense dejection. He felt with John Davidson: "I see there's nothing right; I hope to die to-night." (As is customary among poets. *Vide Sue.*) Hopeless. They could never understand each other. There they were. For ever. It was no use getting angry about it. Better try and make the best of it. He smiled vaguely: didn't Mrs. Groby say that every cloud had a silver lining? He laughed. There wasn't much silver lining to be seen to-night. Then weariness fell heavier upon him. Slowly he filled his pipe and lit it, but he had smoked too much, and it did not quiet him. He thought: "I'll go to bed. After all one can always sleep and escape the sleep of life where too many dreams come."

As the door closed behind him he heard the clock strike eleven. How swift his thoughts had been! Everything was swift about him now: he undressed; he did not even brush his hair or wash; he wanted only to sleep. Almost at once he was in blackness. He was uneasy, he stirred. It was oppressive, the hot July night and the calling silence beyond. As he shifted he remembered the horrible lines of Irene McLeod:

"Here I lie on a feather bed,
With a feather pillow beneath my head,
From my feet up to my chin
I feel my body sinking in;
And though I writhe and turn about
I cannot lift my spirit out. . . ."

First upon his right side and then upon his left, when his cheek had crumpled the pillow. Then no longer upon his left, for he had smoked too much and his heart would beat. He was all nerves now, and the blackness seemed less; he felt feverish. A star stared at him; he drew the sheet over his head to blot it out, but still his heart beat, and the sheet made a rustling against his ear. He felt hot, oppressed. What was Sue doing? he wondered. He heard no sound in the other room. He wondered whether she were awake. He remembered that other time when he had found her crying. Perhaps she was crying now. Well, he couldn't help it. He couldn't do anything for her, any more than she could for him. They'd have to settle down together and make the best of things, that was all. Live a little more separately. But as he lay so, the sheet harsh against his feverish cheek, this idea of independence chilled him. He was like one of the freed slaves after the War of Secession, wondering what to do with his freedom. And a little pity ran through him too, that she should so be left.

He started. He thought he had heard a faint knock. He listened. All his sinews tightened: it did not come again. He was almost sure she had knocked at his door, and through his anxiety ran an awful consciousness that he wished she would knock again. He listened, but still there was no sound save through the open window the sighing of the night wind in the trees. With sharpened senses he heard many sounds now, horses moving in the mews, distant train rumblings at Addison Road, and subtler sounds, the cracking of wood,

the movements in the fabric of the house that go on interminably as it decays. Through all that he listened for the sound of a knock.

It did not come. He was conscious in himself of a struggle, a complex struggle, an insurgent hope that all might be well, fear lest again something cruel and vulgar might come and, above all, anxiety to end the present anxiety. It was as if some incorporeal thing tugged at him. He leapt out of bed. He was curiously detached, for he noticed the cold floor against his feet. He pulled the door open. There, framed in the doorway, like a ghost in her nightgown, stood Sue. In the moonlight her feet upon the dark carpet were as those of a corpse. She stood, not looking at him, with little dark hands clasped against her breast, abandoned, suppliant. She did not say anything as he seized her, drew her in. Nor did he know what he wanted to say. Perhaps nothing; perhaps he was merely trying to reconquer by emotion what his intellect rejected.

She was all pliant in his arms, and she too said nothing. She knew only that she had been very unhappy for a long time and that in his arms everything seemed all right. She was passive; she did not even clasp him to her, but just yielded herself in his arms. She felt touched with guilt as if once she had refused herself to him. She wanted into his hands to remit herself, into his hands . . .

And now, still silent and close-clasped they lay in each other's arms; unquestioning, unexplaining, they so lay, breast to breast with mingled breaths, yet they clasped between them a shadow that watched them. They could see it as they clasped and kissed, the indecent shadow of despair, daunting and grinning and cold. They hated it, seeing it so well and for its despite they clasped closer, strove more to dominate and to enjoy. Warm against each other, animate with desire, they

fought the shadow. Roger found himself drawing the sheet over their heads as if to blot out the thing that would not go. She knew too, for suddenly her passivity deserted her; she flung hot arms about his neck. Yes, they had their minute, the minute when with fled thoughts they knew only what they could touch, the actual. They were each other's then and violently conscious that each one was the other's, conquest and conqueror in one. He knew her as he had never known her before, the touch, the warmth of her, the lines of her body, the texture and the scent of her hair, the consented wedding of their very essence. Conquest rather than sacrifice, and determination by mutual conquest to efface the hanging thing that watched. So he ground her in his arms, perhaps that she might no longer herself be but become him, become a "them", faultless in each other's eyes because made of both. Later, even such thoughts as those grew too transcendental. They knew only that they were man and woman, desirous and young. They were violent, they were anxious. But in their extremity, when at the crest of their delight, when speech ceded to murmurs, a doom hung over their achieved embrace. It was the love-making of two people who did not love each other any more . . .

Much later in the night he sat up. The dawn was breaking, swiftly driving her rosy chariot behind her orange steeds. Sue lay asleep, the dark cheek indented upon the pillow, the hair curling like fern fronds, the long lashes making blue shadows upon the olive cheek. She smiled as she slept with the dew of morning upon her red open lips, as if in the night had come with satisfaction reassurance. But he sat looking at her, his hands clasping his knees. There she lay in her loveliness, who not long before had indeed loved him, whom not long before he had loved. But a few short hours and in each other they had forgotten the world, thought to expel it. Now the world was waking, and the rosy

chariot of dawn already blenched in the rising sun. Day was coming, and with day the truth. It could not always be cloaking night; with the sun must come that shadow which for a moment they had blotted out.

PART THE FOURTH
LEAVES OF HOLLY

Plus me plaist le séjour qu'ont basti mes ayeux,
Que des palais Romains le front audacieux :
Plus que le marbre dur me plaist l'ardoise fine,

Plus mon Loyre Gaulois, que le Tybre Latin,
Plus mon petit Lyré, que le mont Palatin,
Et plus que l'air marin la douceur Angevine.
(Joachim du Bellay.)

CHAPTER THE FIRST

RAMSGATE SANDS

I

SUE sat upon the beach in a striped twopenny chair. Her rather awkward fingers struggled with a piece of drawn-thread work while Mrs. Cawder by her side encouraged her. She leaned over. "Now be careful, count, twelve threads." Sue obediently counted and prepared to cut. "Wait," said Mrs. Cawder anxiously, "don't cut yet." They counted again. "There! you'd thirteen. You must be very careful; if you cut the wrong one the thing's spoiled."

"Yes, Mrs. Cawder," said Sue obediently, then blushed, for she knew she ought not to have said "Mrs. Cawder."

It seemed so rude, the way these people had of talking, their grunts, and "whats" and blunt "Yeses" and "Noes." Still, that was society. They went on with their work, both of them, Mrs. Cawder merely knitting a muffler, for her eyes, she said, were too weak for drawn-thread work. She was extraordinarily old. She was one of those old ladies with beautiful white hair and a complexion like brown ivory, the kind that has perfect hands and wears slightly starched, very delicate laces. Chloe, a grandmother!

The work was difficult, but Sue liked to think she was doing it instead of knitting stockings; it felt so refined. She put it down for a moment, thinking how refined she was getting.

Sue was rather pleased with herself that morning on Broadstairs beach. She knew that Miss Ponkey had

done her good; also she liked Miss Ponkey and her way of saying, "I quite understand." One ended by believing that, and it was comfortable. In a way she felt quite the lady; her white suede shoes,—they too were quite the lady. In ten months she had become conscious of the difference between her mother and her old friends on the one hand and her new friends on the other. She felt she could say the right thing, well, not always but now and then. She had ventured into art criticism after seeing Mr. Percy Bigland's picture, "Life." She thought it a wonderful picture: A youth standing near an abyss by the side of a beautiful girl. He was about to plunge into the unknown but was held back by a vision, the Christ in a dazzling gleam. The maiden by his side, a glowing emblem of the whirling pleasures of the world, tried in vain to shut out the vision by shading his eyes with her hand. The light still streamed through. She found that Mrs. Forncett also liked that picture very much. That had led to Mrs. Forncett's trying to teach her to play golf, which was not exactly the lesson of the picture and its emblems of an enticing world. Sue had gone further; she had given a tea party on her own and carried it off pretty well: she was not very well up in the pleasures of the town, but she made great play with the Tate Gallery which everybody else guiltily felt they had not visited for years; that gave Sue superiority. And when she said that Puccini's music was the passion of a literary hairdresser her success was enormous. Other things too: she could take a taxi now, not without consciousness but without fear; and she could tip the man twopence instead of sixpence, which she had done as soon as she realised that she ought to tip at all. All this had not made her happy; she thought it had, but as she grew familiar with surrounding comfort what it had done was to make her feel swollen and important, which is almost the same thing. She even realised that

The Tatler and *The Bystander* were more in her new line than the halfpenny picture papers. *The Bystander* lay on the sand just then with *The Sphere*. Yes, these papers too were quite the lady. Mrs. Cawder had *Country Life*; Sue felt that it must be very good because it was so thick. Apparently there were still altitudes to climb, but she was getting on. It was a little bleak though, up there.

Never before had Roger been to a place such as Broadstairs. Most of his holidays, as a boy, had been spent at St. Olaves, digging for rabbits and fishing for dace in the Char. Later he had gone on walking tours with other Gabriel men in Switzerland and Belgium. His inclination now lay towards the more arty places, Pulborough and Winchelsea, or Cornwall (where the modern novel comes from). But somehow he did not want to hide with Sue in a deserted country. An obscure instinct in him told him not to stress the contrast between their habits until that contrast was less. Of course he did not tell himself that, for it was the truth. He told himself that Settlement work would require him from time to time in London. Also Theresa had settled at Grove Ferry, giving as reasons that she had never heard of anybody going there, which meant that it would be restful; also she liked the suggestion of the grove and the ferry. Roger reflected that Broadstairs was not far from Grove Ferry, so he could — well, one wanted — and, damn it all, why shouldn't he be near Theresa?

They were not uncomfortable at the hotel; it was rather a quiet little hotel, and the guests were not as repulsive as they might have been. It was mainly a military and golfy sort of society, with a hint of adventure and irregularity, as represented by Miss Grange. A rather rosy young novelist with a short moustache, who had drifted through the hotel, commented upon the openings of Miss Grange's blouses and

christened them "world without end", adding that if he were in Trouville instead of Broadstairs he would try to say Amen. There was Captain Saltaire too, who expressed powerful emotions by means of monosyllables; It was a way they had in the Buffs. Sue was not unhappy in this society; it was well-bred, so its members gazed at each other with an air of contempt and hatred. They did not thrust themselves upon each other. She exchanged a few words with some of the women while they washed. It had not been a success, for she puzzled them; they were suspicious, and they looked at her as if through a lorgnette. She got on best with Miss Grange, because Miss Grange was so pretty and seemed so lonely, and had a fat old uncle staying with her who never would leave her. Sue felt sorry for her, for people were not at all nice to poor Miss Grange and her uncle, except Captain Saltaire. No, she reflected, they were all rather cats except dear old Mrs. Cawder with whom she sat. She was often with her, for Mr. Cawder was a great golfer and passed, it seemed, all his time from dawn to sunset on the links. He took Roger with him too. She did not like that but supposed it was good for him. And so she sat in silent companionship with the old lady, painfully counting threads, afraid lest she should cut the wrong one, now and then snatching a glance at the few swimmers who from time to time came out of the hotel in bath robes. It was not thronged, but it was amiable, refinedly amiable, screamless. The little boys made sand castles silently and efficiently, just as they would build bridges by and by in India. And the little girls sat with their nurses, reading L. T. Meade and Grace Aguilar. It was pleasant, it was morning, and soft brightness fell from the air.

Miss Grange and her uncle came out of the hotel. He did look large in that bath gown, and why did he cord it so low as to make himself look larger? And

she so pretty, like a little girl who somehow was big. Miss Grange threw off her bath robe at the edge of the water, and Sue felt a pang of envy. Oh, the pretty bathing dress! Pink silk! It was a little discomfiting to Sue for, well, pink — one didn't look very much dressed. But Miss Grange wore pink silk stockings and bathing shoes with tango lacings. Sue remembered that when bathing the day before she had actually gone in without stockings. In the water were two other women also in stockings. Her heart grew heavy: yes, she had done it again. She wondered, however, whether even if everybody did wear stockings when they bathed she should do so too; she now had enough social usage to know that a thing was not necessarily right when everybody did it. Dared she ask? She looked at Mrs. Cawder sideways; the old lady smiled.

"Well, my dear," she said, "what is it?"

Sue felt she wanted to kiss her.

"I was thinking, Mrs. . . ." She caught herself up in time. "I don't wear stockings when I bathe; they feel so sticky when you're wet."

"Well?"

"D'you think I ought to wear stockings?"

Mrs. Cawder looked at her affectionately.

"My dear, it's just as you like." The old lady wondered for a moment how it was that Sue should ask her this. There was something funny about the girl. Sweet, of course; much more than pretty. But — what was it? Was it Tooting or what? She had not the heart to leave her perplexed. "If you want my honest opinion," she said, "I prefer stockings. But I'm quite Victorian, my dear; I'm almost Georgian. I just tell you because you ask me."

"Thank you so much," said Sue emotionally. She wished Mrs. Cawder would adopt her and tell her things in that nice insinuating way. But still, the fact remained that she had bathed without stockings. They

394 THE STRANGERS' WEDDING

wore stockings on Olympus, and there she went stockingless. And heaven only knew what else wrong she had done or was doing. She remembered her mother's frequent remark and almost made it aloud: "It's a weary world."

Captain Saltaire, who had been watching Miss Grange as she carefully entered the water and stopped as it reached her knees to turn and smile at the numerous men who were pretending not to see her, grew conscious of the bulky uncle; he seemed rather specially to disapprove of him. Languid he came towards them.

"Mornin'," he said, as if he were thinking of something else.

Mrs. Cawder asked him how he had done in the tennis tournament the day before.

"Went down in the first round. Don't mind. Too hot for tennis."

Mrs. Cawder smiled.

"You are slack, you young men, nowadays. Why don't you start a cup and ball competition?"

"Not half bad idea. I could do with a cup if there was somethin' in it."

The soldier's distraught eyes rested upon Sue. She was a damned fine girl, he thought, and married too. Well, that wasn't against her; they were easier when they were married. Must say something to her. He looked at Mrs. Cawder eloquently, and the old lady, sensitive to his interest, introduced them. He bent down to look at the drawn-thread work and at the strong brown hands.

"Can't make out how you do it," he murmured; "used to know a chap who went in for tapestry. He was a sapper," he added hurriedly. "They're all a bit cracked, you know. Still, wish I was up to it; gives a fellow something to think about."

Sue looked up at him; she was blushing a little. She felt impelled to offer to teach him. She nearly did,

for Mrs. Cawder was there; alone she would not have dared. She said:

"You just draw as many threads as you want and then you work the pattern with a needle and cotton."

"Yes," said Captain Saltaire, meaning "No", unstirred save by the dark flush on her cheeks. "Frightfully interestin'. What's it for? Antimacassar?"

"I don't know," said Sue. "Mrs. Cawder says we can send it to the rector's sale of work when it's done, but I don't think it'll fetch much." She grew thoughtful. "I wonder how much those things *are* worth? One might make quite a good living at it." She looked at Mrs. Cawder enviously. "If one worked as fast as you, why, one might make quite a pound a week at it."

"Keep you in cigarettes," said Saltaire, smiling.

Sue did not hear; she went on talking rather more to herself than to her companions, wondering whether drawn-thread sold better than crochet, comparing the price of lace in Regent Street and in Westbourne Grove. Captain Saltaire looked bored. Also Miss Grange came out of the water and began to dry in the sun the perfect silk stockings with the tango lacings. He strolled away after a while, and there was a very long silence, nearly a quarter of an hour. Sue felt she had done something, said something. She was not really getting on, she felt. She had got on with certain people, but she was not getting on with all of them. At last she had to ask Mrs. Cawder.

"I don't quite see what you mean, my dear," said the old lady. "Of course he was not offended."

"I thought . . ."

"Well, you couldn't expect him to be interested in what those things cost, could you?"

"No." Sue detected a coldness. "Mrs. Cawder," she whispered, and remembered that people did not discuss these things and wondered why, "tell me, p'raps I oughtn't to have talked about what those things cost?"

The old lady looked at her for a while unsmiling: what should she say to this charming child who seemed so uneducated and made such an incomprehensible combination with that nice husband of hers? Of course, she did rather impossible things, but could she tell her? She ought to, but . . . So she gathered up her knitting and said: "My dear, one of these days, when you feel inclined, tell me a little about yourself. Not now, I'm going now,—only if you feel inclined. Life's rather difficult; we must make of it what we can. That's more difficult even than drawn-thread work."

When Sue was alone she felt that she could cry. Exposed somehow, doing wrong, young and not being told, and Roger away all day playing golf, so he didn't care; nobody else told her, nobody else cared. A boy with a tray of sweets passed; she bought some chocolates and covertly ate them, not at all sure that she might do that on the beach, though she had an idea that eating on the beach was not the same thing as eating in the street. Still, the chocolates were full of cream, and soon she felt a little better.

II

"I've asked Theresa to lunch," said Roger, "she's coming to-morrow."

"Oh!" said Sue. "Is she coming down from London?"

"No," said Roger, "she's at Grove Ferry."

"Where's Grove Ferry?"

"Quite near here, about half an hour in the train."

"Oh!" said Sue thoughtfully. "Half an hour in the train. How long has she been there?"

"I don't know, some time."

"Has she been there ever since we came?"

"I think so. Yes, she has."

Sue thought for a little while.

"Funny she didn't tell me. I saw her just before we left. Told *you*, didn't she?"

Roger stared: "Told *me*? Of course she told me but — what — what the devil d'you mean by this?" He hated himself; this was the second time he had sworn at a woman, and the Huncotes did not do that. At least that was their tradition: they did swear at them, and occasionally they beat them, as they occasionally drank too much port. But family pride had erased these facts from the family records.

Sue nearly replied: "What I say," but this had caused trouble before, and she was not angry yet; she was only piqued. "I didn't mean anything, Roger, only it seems funny she should tell you and not me."

"Now look here, if you're jealous, if we're going to have a scene, let's have it at once."

"It's you who are making a scene," said Sue.

"I'm not making a scene," Roger shouted. He wondered what was coming over him; in these days he could not control his temper. "Only when I find you questioning me and hinting at heaven knows what, just because Theresa's a friend of mine, and I like to go and see her and talk to her now and then . . ."

"Oh?" Sue interrupted. Then very slowly: "So you've been to see her, Roger, on the q.t.?"

She wished she had not said that,— Ada Nuttall's fault. Her husband looked at her with a hard face.

"Yes," he said, "I've been to see her, and what if I have?"

"You might have told me."

"Why?"

"It doesn't look nice for a married man to go running after a single lady."

"Don't say 'single lady.' I've already told you."

"Well, after a girl then."

"I'm not running after her."

"Then why didn't you tell me?"

"Oh!" Roger burst out, "how do I know? Don't you understand that one sometimes wants to have a little private life with one's personal friends? Things one doesn't talk about to everybody?"

"When a man's married . . ." Sue began.

He interrupted and swore again: yes, that was it. Sue would never understand. Marriage: rabbits in a hutch, all that. And beastly suspicious if one tried to escape for five minutes. He told her that, and Sue, who until then had been calm, grew angry. For long minutes, face to face with clenched hands, they showered upon each other short, angry little taunts. He was running after Theresa. Yes, he was.

"You don't seem to understand . . ."

"Well, I know that much."

"You think people can't know each other without there being something wrong in it."

"A fat lot you know about what I think."

"But why don't you tell me instead of sulking?"

"Call me sulky? *Me?*"

They hated each other, they hated themselves. She felt unjust because she trusted him and yet could not cease abusing him. And he hated himself because his conduct was guiltless and he felt, as he hated this woman and remembered the other, a growth of guilty desire. According to their moral standards both were pure, and so they hated each other and themselves, because their quarrel was driving them towards what they thought impure. They had no knowledge of the world, no cynicism; they were paying the penalty of having been chaste in thought and deed; they were suffering because they thought too highly of a faithfulness which each was driving the other to abandon.

III

Roger Huncote thought of a phrase of Pierre Veber: "*Tout s'arrange.*" It did, in a way, arrange itself. No doubt the harem favourite in the sack arranges herself more or less with the cat and the snake in the Bosphorus when all three begin to drown.

Sue was very unhappy. She was viewing her husband more impersonally than she had ever viewed any human being. This man with whom she had thought to achieve perfect unity was a stranger. If she had known the world she would have called him a prig; as it was, she only reflected that he did not talk to her as to other people. He was dull and, not knowing that she irritated him, she thought him bad tempered. He was not correcting her much now; that pleased her, for it made life more comfortable, and it did not strike her that he cared less. But they were civilised people; he very much so, she more or less; they preserved the outer graces of conversation, and at meals new arrivals thought they looked a charming young couple. They even mixed more intimately. One evening, while Roger was dressing, Sue came into his bedroom and wandered about, looking at the water colours upon the wall and at his studs. She observed him brushing his teeth. That made her talk.

"You oughtn't to use so much tooth powder, Roger," she said. "They say it rubs the enamel off. Not that you don't want it now and then, smoking such a lot as you do. There's a special sort for smokers, isn't there? Smoker's tooth powder, they call it. I'm glad I don't smoke, makes one's teeth go so yellow, don't you think? Still one has to use some tooth powder sometimes. Those mouth washes they advertise in the papers, they don't do as well, do they? I don't believe that Zena Dare only uses what the advertisements say she does. She's got such a pretty smile, don't you think?"

She paused as he did not reply and then went on nervously as if she could not stop:

"There's paste too, stuff you rub the brush on. I always think it's too soapy, don't you? Frothing up in your mouth like anything. Of course that's best if you've got a hard brush, makes it softer. I don't like a hard brush, do you? Hurts one if one isn't careful. I always think you've got to stand it in the glass for the water to soften it a bit. Only one mustn't forget to dry it, must one? They say it gets musty if you don't, and all the bristles fall out . . ."

He did not reply. He went on brushing his hair; perhaps he was not listening. She was talking more than she used now that she was surer of herself. And what a topic! But, as if she did not notice, she went on from tooth brushes in general to tooth brushes with close bristles, and distant bristles, to long bristles and short bristles, and then back again to mouth washes, to a spirited comparison between Odol and Sozodont. He had finished brushing his hair now and was putting on his collar.

The early violence of his desire for her had gone. Their young passion had turned into a convention. On the night when Sue recited "The Wreck of the Raspberry Jam" it had turned into a mere protest. He had never been her companion, he was not even her mate. He seemed always to be thinking of something and never about her. She realised that and thought: "I'm all alone." The world seemed so large to her who had been born in a little corner of it. The world had seemed so gorgeous and so impersonal from afar, a sort of Albert Hall where, of course, you would not go alone but always with somebody you loved very much in the next seat. Now the seat was empty and she sat alone in the Albert Hall of life. She felt cold and frightened; she exaggerated her own importance. She thought that everybody stared at the vacant seat next to her and

wondered why nobody sat in it. She was very lonely. She used to go up-stairs and down-stairs, pretending to fetch something, just to have something to do, to walk up and down the front all alone, envying the couples. She too had been in Arcadia long ago, and she did not know why she had been turned out. Or had she really been in Arcadia? "It's like a dream," she thought.

It had indeed been a dream come to her in the sleep of life. And now, dreamless, she slept. She went for little walks. She went to the railway station to see the trains come in. It was funny on the bridge, for she remembered the little boys who used to hang over a bridge like that in St. Panwich and try to spit upon the engine driver as the trains went by. She liked the station. Everybody seemed so excited at meeting everybody or sorry to see them go. For Sue was a true woman and understood only the emotions: pain of parting, joy of meeting, love fulfilled, envy of clothes, fear of pain, all those things she understood, and some of them were in the railway station, that gate at which so many delights enter and so many die.

She had not after all told Mrs. Cawder about herself. She had thought of telling her a romantic story, of how she was the daughter of "an ancient house of high lineage" who had been kidnapped in infancy by gipsies. Then one day she was recognised owing to a coronated handkerchief when she was singing . . . in the snow, of course, in the snow. Or, on the other hand, she could be a Mystery, something foreign and rather royal, who was just pretending to be, what did they call it? yes, incorknito, just for a quiet life. Or she might tell her the truth, washtub and all. But when it came to it she could not. Sue tried to talk to Miss Grange too, but was horrified because Miss Grange responded and told her three stories, one of which she could not even understand. The other two made her shudder, especially as the sweet little mouth of the sweet little girl, who hap-

pened to be big, expressed at the end views on men which she decorated with every adjective Sue had heard in the mouths of the draymen in St. Panwich High Street. It was horrible; like a lily growing in a cesspool. And to make it worse Miss Grange's uncle arrived and, when Miss Grange was not looking, took Sue by the arm and winked at her. It made her sick, for his eyelid was so fat that when he winked it looked like a pink sausage moving.

She found herself getting friendly with Lizzie, the chambermaid. She took to going up to her bedroom after breakfast and talking to Lizzie while she did the room. Lizzie was small and very fair and thought Sue lovely. She told her, and Sue liked that. Also she hinted she'd seen a deal of trouble and had a young man, 'Enry, a stoker in the P. & O., whose photograph she showed Sue on the third morning. Lizzie liked Sue, and she got into trouble now and then for wasting time, for she liked to talk to Sue, vaguely feeling that she need not call her M'am too often, and discussing whether she'd be well-advised to buy that second-hand coal scuttle they had in a shop at Margate. Lizzie was getting the little home together while the mysterious 'Enry stoked on the China seas. It was very grateful to Sue, this plunge into something she could understand: Lizzie in heaven by and by, in one room near Tilbury Docks, managing nicely on fifteen bob a week, counting what she earned, and 'Enry coming back very much in love every few months. But suddenly she realised it would not do. She was sliding back. This intimacy was pulling her down. She was a lady now, and she could not do the nice things people did who weren't ladies. So, the next morning, Lizzie fussed and waited in vain in the bedroom, for Sue did not come up. She had reproached herself for this backsliding; her poor little edifice of importance and self-satisfaction was collapsing like a bit of sugar in a cup of tea.

IV

That morning was Bank Holiday. Sue stood outside the hotel a little excited because it was Bank Holiday. There was Bank Holiday in the air. It awoke old feelings, raised old Bank Holidays that had come like saturnalia, then gone to glamour. There was agitation even in Broadstairs and down the sunny little street that curls away towards the front; she thought she could hear upon the refined beach music less refined. A couple passed by, from London obviously; the lady was carrying the gentleman's stick. They were laughing; they were passing her by; and she felt envious and left. They were nearing the corner. She heard him say: "Have a banana?" And then they were round the corner, and she was left upon the steps of the hotel in a piqué frock, with a champagne-coloured sweater, refined and alone.

A few yards away a motorbus, marked Ramsgate, was rumbling eagerly, as if it wanted to be off. It was not very full yet, for Broadstairs probably intended to be orgiastic in its own discreet way. The conductor was anxious to fill up, and Sue upon the steps all alone inspired him: "Come on! Come on, lidy! All for Ramsgit! Come on, lidy! Run you down t' the briny in arf an hour."

Sue smiled; the conductor smiled back: "Come on, lidy, yer don't want t' miss Bank 'Oliday. Ah! I can see yer want t'go, lidy. That's right! 'Ave a little bit o' wot yer fancy; I think it does yer good."

Sue was aware of tumultuous emotions. She had Bank Holidayed before now, generally at Southend. He was a thrilling conductor, and half the busload was laughing at him and at her, not unkindly. Bank Holiday! Pierrots! Cocoanuts! The slumbrous past! Why not? Roger was playing golf, and even if he

wasn't, she thought, he wouldn't miss her. She did not pause, she leapt into the bus and, as if spider-like the bus had waited only for her, it quivered with excitement and with a roaring rasp bore her off, thrilled and terrified, as Proserpina in the embrace of Pluto. They were not quite bank-holidayish in the bus; some came from Margate and implied that they came from Cliftonville; a few were from Broadstairs. Nobody ate anything, and she heard a large red woman say that she wanted to see what Bank Holiday was like. That was why she was going to Ramsgate. But in any case she would not much have noticed her companions then. She was an escaped school-girl out of bounds, and the flat fields of Thanet, accursed tram-soiled isle, fields of mangy grass and dirty earth, seemed an Eden.

She was in Ramsgate. She was afraid. There was heat and dust, and music in the air. For a moment she stopped where the bus had put her down, looking at the old Victorian houses with their narrow verandahs of wrought iron, at "Chatsworth", at "Greville Towers" (otherwise known as Number 42), all of them board-residences or apartments, all more or less To Let, each one with its drawing-room, each one with its aspidistra in a pot, one aspidistra in a green pot with a pink sash, one aspidistra in a yellow pot with a blue sash . . .

She was afraid, afraid of the mob. The mob came marching down continuously from the railway station, meeting other mobs from the station near the sands, the mobs from the tramways, the mobs from the busses and the charabanes, the little mobs that trickled from the apartments houses. She was shouldered, she was jostled and, oh delirium, she was winked at. But already she was afraid of being seen, all alone like that. It felt frightfully lonely in the Bank Holiday crowd, that hectic London crowd, its men with the earthy faces, its

tired girls, its rouged girls, its rowdy boys with wood-bines stuck to their under-lip, its fat black Jewish flappers from Mile End. She was afraid and also she was hungry. Oh, why had she been so quick? Why hadn't she even brought sandwiches which she could eat in a quiet place? She laughed at herself. "A quiet place in Ramsgate!" She thought: "Can't stand here all day," and it struck her that to eat would help her to hide. She went into an Italian restaurant under the arches, a steaming little place where the perspiration of waiters, the persistent smell of steak and onions, and the aroma of gold flake assailed her, reminiscent and, therefore, delicious. She sat down at a little table with two stranger girls; she did not know how happy she was: here was neither caviare nor white paint. She would like to have talked to the girls who, looking at her suspiciously as if they thought she was not quite one of them, carried on a continual and exciting conversation about somebody they called "they." She caught snatches of it now and then.

"They wouldn't let me go, and what could I do? And there I was, and the last train gorn, so I said to 'em, it's all very well, I said, I'll be locked out, I said . . ."

Sue struggled with a very tough leg of cold fowl and listened hard. But there was too much noise. The three waiters filled the room with shrill, musical Italian, corks popped, forks clattered on plates, and a family party next to her alternately smacked and soothed its children. And a young couple distracted her. He was doing her proud with a bottle of ginger ale done up in tin foil "just like champagne wine." But they ate and drank only at intervals. The two sat unashamedly hand in hand, shoulder against shoulder. Sue thought of a snatch: "Joshua, Joshua! Sweeter than strawberries and cream, you are." She sighed, for it hurt her a little, and she ate quickly as if she wanted to get

away, out in the open where she could be more personally alone. The girls were still whispering.

"Oo, rather. 'E's a gentleman."

"No!"

"Tell you 'e is. 'E's a medical student, 'e is. Dental."

She went out again, fed and unsatisfied. She felt just a little stuck up, for this was the first time she had lunched alone at a restaurant: Bank Holiday. She had lunched late, and those who had not left the boarding houses clustered in their front gardens. There were large groups of young men with faces inflamed by the sun, all grades from pink to purple, bearing all kinds of blisters from mere fray to vaccination patch: they had not long been by the sea. The Jewish boarding houses with the mysterious lettering drew her perhaps more than any, for there the families, dark, fat, extensively dressed, reposed in each other's abundant bosoms, somewhat sleepy after food, conscious of its cost, grandmother, grandfather, hoyden, and little child, uncle and every aunt they had ever had . . .

It was half-past two; Ramsgate was at the full of its holiday. She went out upon the front where a military band was playing musical comedy successes to thousands and thousands of chairs, each one tenanted, some of them tenanted by two, and round them the vast mobs that looked black and white as the light dresses of the girls mixed with the men's dark city suits. White straw hats with 'varsity ribbons, regimental colours combined with silk hats. She could hardly move. At every step she butted into young men that begged pardon, or into girls who sniffed at her sweater. She felt conscious of her champagne sweater among all those others, mostly sky blue or pink. A heat and a dust rose about her towards the sky that was as a blue pearl. Everywhere round her was laughing and canoodling and spooning. Yes, indeed, for there was a swirl in

the crowd and towards her, clearing all before them came six boys, with six fags in their six mouths, who as they smoked swaggered and sang:

“If the man in the moon
Were a coon,
Would you spoon
With the man in the moon? . . .”

She could not help laughing; they were all laughing as the boys passed. Voices blended into a solid hum. The band streaked it; “Tara! Tara! Tantara!” screamed its trumpets. And the voice of an ice-cream vender: “Hoy! Hoy! Hokey-pokey! Penny a lump!” All were gay, even the Jewish flappers who, dressed up, went in pairs telling each other about their rich relations in Hampstead. It was all so violent and alive that somehow she no longer felt alone. She looked at her neighbours, smiled at them and they at her. But at once she grew afraid of being seen. No, she must not stay here. She thought of the sands.

There they lay, just under the front, the illimitable yellow sands, so vast, so flat, that the thousands of striped chairs dotted everywhere made but small marks. There lay the sands, and there was no sea, for the endless line of bathing machines obscured it, the bathing machines, each one with its little knot of two or three waiting their turn, and its smart rowdy keeping an open eye for scanty costumes. Only on one or two places, in gaps between the machines, could she see the sea. It was full, full. There was no water near the edge but only a bobbing mass of red and blue bathing dresses, masses of children that screamed and plunged among the adults who never got wet above their waists. From the sands towards her rose the vast clamour of the crowd which all the time she could see reinforced by the steady black and white streams that still came down from the railway station. Far stretched the

sands. Farther on she could see where tennis courts had been marked out for the people to play pat-ball, or where games of cricket had hurriedly been organised. Strokes were being clapped, cheered. She heard hurrahs, bravos, mouth-organs. Much farther black specks danced where inexperienced riders suffered proud pangs on hired horses. It thrilled her, it made her want to plunge into this life so large . . . And here was another band, a denser one that bellowed: "Boom! BOOM! PATaboom . . . squeak!" challenging the other's "Tara! Tara! TantaRA!"

But down upon the sands she at last felt alone. The sun beat heavy upon her head. She went down to the edge of the water where the grown-ups were paddling; she envied those people with tucked-up skirts and for a second wanted to pull off her shoes and stockings. But still, she was afraid: to be seen was bad enough, but to be seen paddling . . . She felt different, and this increased her loneliness. So for a long time she went along the sands where everybody was picknicking, where perspiring fathers with immense efforts opened bottles of beer, where everywhere was a crying child that had got lost, except where a mother, already tired, dragged on and shook something that screamed and wept in the characteristic way a child has of showing its pleasure on Bank Holiday. She stood in front of the Punch and Judy Show. "PittywittyEEK! Kerh-O! Whatawhata! KeeminuteeWEEK!" Punch screamed. She felt so lonely in the midst of the old life . . .

Suddenly she grew conscious of Alf. She did not yet know his name was Alf, but Alf it was. Alf was rather like a rat, with small eyes and an enquiring nose. But he had a nice smile and a moustache that made one think together of the military and the hairdresser's shop. She had noticed Alf once or twice during the last five minutes, sometimes in front of her, sometimes by her side. It embarrassed her horribly as

soon as she realised that Alf was keeping upon her that sharp eye. Not that he displeased her; she liked the moustache, and it did not occur to her to think that this might be only because she was married to a clean-shaven man. Still, she was rather afraid. She walked on hurriedly a few steps round to the right, behind the Punch and Judy show. To her horror and delight, as she rounded the crowd Alf came face to face with her.

"Hallo!" he said. "All on your lonesome?"

She did not reply. Her heart beat heavily, her body was in tumult. A year before she would have known how to snub him; during the past year she should have learnt how to ignore him. But she had lost the art of cockney snubbing without gaining the art of aloofness; she had been something and had become nothing. Alf came a little closer.

"If you aren't meeting anybody I ain't. Is 'e waitin' for yer round the corner?"

"No," said Sue rather miserably. Of course nobody was waiting for her round the corner. Then she realized too late that she had spoken; she was caught. Alf knew it. He took for granted that they were to pass the afternoon together. He told her it was very hot, then remarked generally: "Hot place, Ramsgate." She agreed and found that she had walked on two steps with him. It was dreadful and delicious; it was like drowning. Alf jabbered on: he was a plasterer, it seemed, and his name — well, she could call him Alf, she could. It thrilled her, the old voice, and she laughed when he pointed at an old man with a bulbous nose and asked her whether that was not one of God's left-overs. She was still shy, then told herself: "After all, why not?" An anxiety seized her. She had worn gloves in the motorbus and automatically put them on again after lunch. That was all right, but she would have to take them off. So, very slowly, as she walked by Alf's side, listening as he criticised the band,

she worked off her left glove and then by degrees her wedding ring. It was sacramental and terrible, this taking off of the wedding ring, and as she put it into the pocket of her sweater and looked at her bare hand, it seemed as if she had thrown her old life behind her.

"I'm in the buildin' line," said Alf. "I'm having a week's holiday on my own. Thought I'd come here; it's rather cheerful, ain't it?"

"Yes," said Sue. "I've never been here before."

"Oh," he said, without interest.

Alf did not want to know much about her. Indeed he talked busily as if he did not want her to question him too much, being rather conscious that if his wife had not been ill she would have accompanied him that day. He must divert her from questions, he felt. "Let's have a bathe," he said, and as he spoke let an admiring gaze rest rather heavily upon the broad-breasted young woman yet so girlish in her white piqué frock.

"Oh, no," said Sue, "I couldn't." Her eyelashes were cast down, and she looked quite shy.

"G'on," he said. "It'll do you good once in a way."

She looked up at him merrily.

"Oh, I often have a bath," she said.

"Who'd have thought it!" he replied, with suitable raillery. They both laughed together. "P'raps you're right," said Alf. "Might give you a shock. There was a man at Blackpool once . . . ever heard the story of the man who lost his waistcoat?"

"No," said Sue.

"Well, there was a Yorkshireman who went down to Blackpool with his wife, just for the day like you and me, and after they'd bathed and dressed and gorn, 'I've lost my waistcoat,' he said. Well, they looked for it high and low and they couldn't find it. And they looked everywhere at the doss and they couldn't find it. Lost, it was."

"Well," said Sue.

"Well, that ain't the end of the story. In time he forgot all about it, he did, but the year after they came to Blackpool again just for the day, and he hadn't been in the bathing-machine more'n a minute when his wife heard 'im shouting: 'Maria! Maria! I've found my waistcoat!' 'Where was it?' asked Maria. 'You wouldn't believe it,' 'e said; 'it was under me shirt!'"

After a moment required for the full taking in of the story, Sue laughed. Not since the days of Ada Nuttall had she been told a story of this kind, or told it with the animal relish that made it worth while. She laughed so much that she found herself natural with Alf. She did not think it abnormal to be strolling along the sands with him, arm in arm.

"What's your name?" said Alf.

She did not hesitate. "Vera."

"My!" he said. "That's rather swell."

For a fleeting second she thought that that was the name she ought to have had if grandma had not imposed upon her family.

"Yes," she said. "I rather like it."

"Vera," repeated Alf, with relish, "that's what I call a name. You're one of the girls."

"Yes," said Sue automatically, "one of the girls," and felt frightfully Nuttallish. She wished that Ada could see her now; she too could be bold and bad. She wasn't Nuttallish? Well, you wait.

It grew hotter and hotter. From time to time Alf swore as he brushed away the flies. He drew her to a lemonade stand where they formed part of a long file, waiting to be served with something yellow and faintly citric. In the distance the big band descended to rag-time. "Come on and hear! Come on and HEAR! Alexander's Rag Time BAND!" She drank; it was cold. She felt happy. She loved everything. She

had to stop by a fat baby who was perseveringly trying to thrust the head of a doll into a bottle. It laughed at her from every pink crease, and she bent down to poke the fat cheeks. She was no longer her new self, she felt she was again just Sue Groby as she remarked to the baby: "*Oh!* you ole artful." It smiled, and Sue went on tickling the pink neck. "*Oh, you old artful,*" she said.

Alf's hand was more insistent upon her arm; she did not mind for, after all, wasn't everybody doing it round her now? Too hot too, and the sky was blue.

"What's your line?" asked Alf.

"Oh, I'm in business," she said. He understood and did not press. "Staying long?" he asked.

"No," said Sue, "I'm only up for the day."

"Where's 'e gone to?"

"He? There's no he."

"Get along. One's only got to look at you to know there's a he."

"Your brain's dusty," said Sue. (Nuttall!)

Alf laughed. They approached some niggers now who with bones and banjo had collected an immense crowd. They forced their way through the edges of it. They could just see them, the black smiling faces, glistening with perspiration and grease paint. There was an odd melancholy in their lilting song:

"To the cookshop he went dashing,
And who should bring the hash in
But the girl that he'd been mashing
By the sad sea waves."

"D'you think they're really blacks?" said Sue.

"G'on," said Alf, with immense disgust. "You ain't got more sense than a baby; of course they ain't real blacks. You've only got to look round their mouths an' you can see the line where it don't match."

"I see," said Sue humbly and somehow pleased to be

corrected. He felt her pleasure and bought her a stick of chocolate.

And so for a long time these two, arm in arm and now with linked hands, wandered about among the children and the hurdy-gurdies, stopping to cheer ironically where men had stripped off all they dared and threw at the cocoanut shies. They went, loquacious, young and gay among those other people that ate and made love. Alf said: "Have some more chocolate. Or perhaps not, it'll make you sick."

"It's a rumour," said Sue, not quite sure that this was appropriate but quite sure that it was Nuttallish. The afternoon was slowly waning; they went back upon the front. Beyond, in a field, was a miniature menagerie, with the mild-looking wild cat, and the Siberian wolf, hot and panting, so like a dog that it made one suspicious. They both jeered at the zebra.

"Give me the Zoo," said Alf. "This is a fair do. Tell you wot, when we get back to London, I'll take you to the Zoo, I will."

"Thanks," said Sue, "I'm not going back for a while." She switched off from this dangerous conversation to the menagerie. "You know, Alf, that zebra wasn't bad."

He sniffed. "No; still nothing to rip oilcloth over."

Then he tried to persuade her to be photographed. "Come on," he said, "just you an' me, 'and in 'and."

"Oh, I couldn't," said Sue.

"You've got to, just as a souvenir, unless you're afraid my face'll smash the camera."

He was obstinate, and she felt that she could not; this was too much. Besides, it was growing late, it was nearly five. Already the boarding houses were receiving back the crowds making for high tea.

"I must go," she said.

Alf looked at her surprised. "Go?" he said. "I thought you were staying here."

"Well, near here," said Sue. "But—it's getting late."

"What's your hurry?" He led her to the field where was the roundabout, where couples in a state of extreme superficial amorousness rode upon wooden horses, wooden geese, or yet stranger mounts. But she was anxious, she was afraid. These four hours on the loose, who knew how she would have to pay for them?

"I must go," she said again.

"Well, I'll go along with you for a bit," said Alf. "This way to the station."

She did not want to go to the station, but she trusted somewhere to see a bus for Broadstairs, so she followed him along the side of the field. Just before they reached the gate and before she could stop him, he threw an arm about her shoulders, drew her close; she struggled, turning away her face. As she fought she heard ironical cheers, male imitations of feminine giggles, and dimly a hymn rise from a religious meeting:

"There is a fountain filled with BLOOD,
Drawn from Emanuel's veins. . . ."

"Lemme go," she murmured. But he held her fast and, close-pressed, tried to reach her mouth. She did not hate him; she did not even know that she would mind if he kissed her, only she was afraid. She heard the religious band bray. They struggled. She grew defiant: "Now then!" and drove her elbow into him. Still the band, groaning and bloodthirsty, still he pressed on, and she felt weak: "Oh, do behave . . ." she wailed. He laughed and finished the quotation: "Get a shave, Charlie, do give over." He kissed her upon the neck, and at this contact her purity rebelled. Hot and ruffled, she thrust him back against the gate. "Good afternoon," she said, head held very high. "You're a gentleman!" He looked at her angrily. "You're a lady, and now we're both liars!"

She went back in a charabanc. Under her fear she

was still excited and happy, and yet half-crying because she did not know exactly what had happened to her and how strong was the hold of the old life. Then a terror seized her. Roger might be back. He'd want to know what she'd been doing all day. She felt guilty about Alf; after all she had led him on. And it felt disloyal to her new class too. She had done wrong; she would be punished. Supposing somebody had seen her and told? Whatever should she do? She did not get to the hotel until half-past six; Roger was dressing; putting on his tie. "Now for it," she thought, and then more shrinking; whatever should she say? But Roger did not look at her; he looked only at her reflection in the looking-glass. Then he said:

"Hallo, Sue, been out for a walk?"

"Yes," she replied, not knowing whether to add anything. After a moment Roger said:

"I came in from golf about five." Then, half determined to leave her free, half indifferent: "Hang it! I've spoilt this tie." And that was all.

That night she could not sleep and lay crying for a long time. It would have been much better, she dimly felt, if he had questioned her and then sworn at her, and beaten her when he found out. But he did not. He had hardly noticed. He did not care any more. She lay awake while the more discreet Bank Holiday of Broadstairs died away. Some of the Ramsgate Bank Holiday had followed her, for in the night she could hear other niggers singing:

"To the cookshop he went dashing,
And who should bring the hash in
But the girl that he'd been mashing
By the sad sea waves!"

She lay with her face upon the pillow that grew hot and moist with tears, and then for the first time asked herself whether she cared any more.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

REVERSION

I

As the train took him towards Grove Ferry, Roger felt guilty. For he had set out immediately after breakfast, giving Sue the quick husbandly kiss of the occasion. And, though he had not said he was going to golf, he had taken his bag, allowed the sticks to be very obvious. Now the golf clubs lay in the cloakroom at Broadstairs. He felt himself sink deeper into deception. Twice he had been to Grove Ferry on the sly; now he was going to Grove Ferry while pretending to go somewhere else. That was worse. "It's her fault," he reflected, "it's her damn jealousy." And he hated her because she seemed to be driving him towards deception. He brooded over that for a while. Then, by natural association of ideas, he remembered his scene with Sue. Yes, Theresa too had been a little deceitful; she had told him she was going to Grove Ferry, and she had not told Sue. He wondered why. But he did not wonder long, for he was too interested in himself. Besides he could not have understood how much Theresa had hesitated, how guilty she had felt. He could never have understood that she intended nothing, that she just wanted to drift and take her chance with life, and that she obscurely wanted to live in a garden inclosed, giving the key only to him. He would have been shocked, had he understood, for to him Theresa was pure to the point of saintliness; so it would have been delicious and yet dreadful to discover that Theresa was only a woman, capable of deceiving because she loved. The concealment of her

abode for the first time exposed Theresa as a woman: so for the first time he did not understand her. Roger was a little like Sue: she was uncivilised and he was young. "You were married and — well, there you are, there you were." He was the sort of man who can believe in the sanctity of the marriage bond after hearing the decree nisi pronounced against him.

As the train rumbled on through the fields of Thanet that look like an imperfectly reclaimed sewage farm, he still thought of himself and Sue, of the fortnight that had elapsed since Bank Holiday when she had been out all day doing heaven knew what. Not that he cared. He understood their relation better now; it seemed made up of small indifferences to each other's opinion and occupations; they were not even quarrelling now. To think of it wearied him; it was so unstimulating, and he knew that Sue's commonness, of which he was now aware, exasperated him into a priggish and patronising frigidity.

Perhaps he was a prig, or perhaps she made him a prig. If it was her fault: what a grievance! And as he felt a grievance he concluded it must be her fault.

It was very good in Theresa's garden, an old long garden bounded on three sides by the cottage and two white walls. At the bottom of the garden ran the little Stour, half-hidden behind hedges and bulrushes in flower. They sat in the shadow of the cottage and after a few conventional phrases found themselves silent. He thought it was the garden interested him, and it might have, for it was beautiful. Right and left of the central lawn ran the flower beds. At regular intervals, spread upon the wall, were apple trees and apricot trees trained as fans. In front stood the stooping hollyhocks, the foxgloves, loaded with rosy honeycombs, the lupins, rigid and tender as church ornaments. And at their august feet grew smaller plants, mauve asters with golden hearts, shy godetias rooted among the clusters of

shyer aubrietia. At the very end, where the bed disappeared into the river, bloomed pale symbolic lilies. He liked the end of the garden, for the lawn stopped a dozen feet from the water's edge and anything grew there that chose: rock roses, aggressive purple knapweed and pink rest harrow, striving to hide under its own leaves . . .

Theresa suited her old garden. It felt very lonely, for they could hear nothing save Elizabeth singing inside the house, and sometimes a wet sound as a water rat plunged into the Stour. She was all in white, lay slim in the deck chair. She was languid, and for a time he watched the long swaying hand that played with the books upon the ground. He read the title of one of them, *Aucassin et Nicolette*. He did not know it, but the very sound of the words charmed him. And he liked to see upon her lap another book, *The Grettir Saga*. She was smoking a cigarette, a new habit, and for a long time he saw only an æsthetic diagram: slim white fingers, rosy finger nails, curving blue smoke. He wanted very much to tell her — well, what did he want to tell her? He did not know. It felt so odd here among the scents of flower and grass, where there were no sounds save the water, the distant call of a bird and the busy grumble of bumblebee. He gave it up after a while. They just said a few things about Sue's health, about golf, which Theresa really ought to play. They even talked about whether it were easy to get up and down to town. They talked commonplaces as if they feared intimacies, or as if all the intimacies had already been voiced. They were gayer at lunch, when the woes of Elizabeth entertained them. Elizabeth was a cockney and could not understand why it was almost impossible to get fish near the sea, while the local fruit was not a patch on what you could buy in the Edgware Road. They laughed with and at her, and Roger drank too much hock, while a flush of animation rose into The-

resa's pale cheeks. It was not until after, when they sat under the wall, the sun having shifted, when coffee had been made and drunk, that they felt themselves come closer to each other. It was two o'clock, and the heat fell not too oppressive but pressed languid hands upon their eyelids, made them soft and content. Suddenly Roger said:

"I'm very happy here."

Theresa said: "So am I." Then she thought: "How wonderful it could be if you could stay!" She had a vision of herself and Roger in this garden, of course with the flowers always blooming, always together, always easy, practising the art of life, which is to die as delightfully as possible. And it could never be. She sighed and, reacting, wanted to tease him.

"Wake up!" she said. "One doesn't go to sleep before a lady. I'm s'prised at yer." She laughed, meaning him to be amused at her cockneyism.

He shrank away. "Don't," he said.

For a second she stared at him, then she understood. She bent forward.

"Oh, Roger, I'm so sorry — I forgot. Please forgive me, I . . ."

"It's all right," said Roger roughly, "I'm used to it."

She did not know what to say. She knew Sue had improved. Yes, but of course it was impossible. She felt unhappier than ever before. She could feel the whole ache of him passing into her body and hurting her. It was agony. To lose him, well, if she must — but to lose him and to see him unhappy — it was horrible. She had to knit her hands together, so violent was her impulse to throw her arms round his neck, draw him close, bury his eyes in her breast where he could see nothing and hear nothing, feel nothing, be conscious of nothing save the shelter of arms open to none save him. She was lucid; she discussed it with herself.

"It could only make things worse," she thought. So she bent forward again. "Roger," she said. "Is it as bad as all that?"

He nodded. He seemed afraid to speak, like a boy of twelve having his first caning, who wants to cry and is keeping it down.

"I'm sorry," she said, and felt inadequate. But she was irritated too, for she was being balked of the maternal function that belongs to every woman who loves: she wanted to comfort him, and he was not letting her do so. Hesitating, she took his hand. "Tell me," she murmured. "Tell me anything you like."

He looked at her, and as he gripped her hand close she saw a look in his grey eyes that made her think of an animal that has long been hunted.

"What is there to tell?" he said. "You know all about it. I thought I could teach her. I can't."

Theresa made an effort.

"Try," she said. "Are you not impatient? Are you sure you've tried enough — tried in the right way?"

"Ten months," he replied. Then almost to himself: "It seems a very long time. You see, she doesn't understand. One could teach her if she understood, only she doesn't. It's — it's like a doll that says pa-pa when you press the spring, and if you don't press the spring, well — well, it can't say pa-pa; that's all." He grew remorseful. "I oughtn't to talk to you like this. It's sort of disloyal, only what am I to do?"

Theresa did not reply. How could she tell him what he ought to do? "Go on," seemed brutal and silly, but what else could she say?

"You see," Roger went on, "oh, never mind it's being disloyal, I must talk. Don't look shocked, Theresa, that's what I've come to. I don't care whether I'm disloyal or not. And there's the stiff lip, and all that sort of rot. Well, I can't keep a stiff lip any more. I

can't teach her. She does things in public,—I hate telling you,—things like wearing the wrong clothes . . .”

“Dear,” said Theresa. “Isn't that a very little thing when one loves?”

He ignored the last part of the sentence.

“No, it isn't a very little thing to feel uncomfortable and ashamed because one's wife is different somehow from the women one knows. There it is all the time, this difference, reminding one. And it's not only that, it's not only being ignorant and not knowing the right things,—one can put that right; but it's liking the wrong things that's so dreadful, the wrong people.”

“Oh, you mean the relatives?”

“No,” said Roger, with sudden fury. “D'you know who she picks out to try and chum up with? A kept girl at the hotel who's staying there with a fat old beast.”

“Roger!” said Theresa. “Don't be absurd. Of course Sue doesn't know.”

He turned upon her his miserable eyes.

“But don't you understand, Theresa? That's just it, that's what's killing me. If she knew it wouldn't matter. One could tell her not to. It's the fact that she doesn't know the difference, and I can't teach her that, I can't, I can't.”

Theresa did not speak for a long time. Yes, she had never seen it like that. And Roger went on pouring out his pain. He told her the ridiculous little things of the past year, the quarrel with the carter before the servants, the row about the thick tumblers.

“Oh, don't think me a hyper-super,” he said, “only these little things, they go on all the time. The jewellery at our little dinner-party,—you remember.” Theresa nodded. “Well, all that sort of thing; it seems so small, but it goes on and on: little bits of shame, little bits of irritation, little bits of despair falling upon our

marriage like the drops of water that wear away a stone."

Then Theresa made an effort; she was not prim and there was nothing that she could not say or hear, but she felt a little shy of this point, for it concerned the intimate life of the man she loved and of another woman.

"Aren't you forgetting," she said, "the biggest thing of all in marriage when you're young? The — attraction between a young man and a young woman, well, you know what I mean."

He drew away a little; he wished Theresa had not said that. She seemed removed from all that sort of thing, in her snows. He might talk to her about Sue's making up to a kept woman, but that did not imply that she might talk to him of those things.

"That!" he said. "Oh! You don't understand, Theresa. We're beasts, we men, in a way, and even if everything else has gone, even if one despises the woman, well, that may be all right. But not me. I don't say — one tries. It's a sort of bridge; just for a moment one thinks one loves each other as one did. But it makes me feel hateful and — no, I can't talk to you about these things. But that's no good. Don't imagine that two bodies can make a link where two spirits have snapped their chain."

The afternoon waned on; she felt powerless. They changed the conversation and talked commonplaces. Then they returned again to the relations between Roger and Sue, and they said exactly the same things over again. And still the afternoon waned, and the shadow of the western wall lengthened upon the lawn. At last Roger got up.

"I must go," he said. "I didn't look up my train. I must go."

"Oh, don't go quite yet," said Theresa.

He looked long and unhappily into the dark eyes, at

the mouth where now was no mockery. Dimly he knew how very much he needed this woman. He had not yet come to wanting her. He knew only that here he was happy and at rest, and that she filled him with a sense of eternal happiness. He was not thinking of Sue; he had no idea of guilt. Those rigid principles of his did not reproach him, for he was not yet committing adultery in his soul.

"Good-by," he said again. Theresa looked at him without speaking. He bent down. "I don't want to go," he muttered, and put both hands upon her shoulders. "I don't want to go," he said again, with the slim shoulders shaking a little under his hands, "but I must." And then he was upon his knees by her side, for the first time holding her close in his arms, and no longer kissing her upon the cheek as he had once kissed his good comrade, but kissing her upon the lips and holding her hard-pressed, kissing her filled with despair, as if he thought upon her mouth to find a recipe for healing rather than a fountain of delight. She did not resist, she did not move. She was too weak to feel disloyal. She lay in his arms unresponding, unrebelling, as if fate had thrown her dice for her.

II

Roger and Sue felt far apart, and so they grew farther apart. They hardly noticed: a little farther, a little nearer,—what was that? Roger, it seemed, played golf every day either with Mr. Cawder or unknown friends. Sue found the making of friends less easy. Beyond Mrs. Cawder, whom she still puzzled, nobody took her up except Miss Grange. She was attracted by Miss Grange because she was so pretty and seemed so innocent even when she told dreadful stories. She hinted to Mrs. Cawder that Miss Grange told dreadful stories, and the old lady in her charity said:

"Probably she doesn't understand them herself; she's too young, she only repeats what she's been told, poor little thing."

Mrs. Cawder meant to be charitable, and all she did was to encourage Sue further into compromising herself with the only woman who could compromise her. By degrees Miss Grange became confidential; she almost told Sue the truth, and Sue accepted it because she was still her St. Panwich self: one was a bad lot and that was a pity, but this was a hard world. Sue was not as some women in her new class who in private do not profess to have any morals and maintain them only for public exhibition; she had the most rigid morals in private, and so in public she could afford to relax. Also this was a hard world; she knew that. She had had to live on bread and dripping sometimes. They didn't know, the others. But still Miss Grange did not help her much socially, for her language was together coarse and smart. One morning, when she had ordered gin and bitters and the waiter brought her gin and orange instead of gin and peach, she loudly called him, "You blighter!" and asked Sue: "Wasn't it bloodsome? Wasn't it pink?" It seemed to Sue much worse than the real words she was used to in St. Panwich High Street. Miss Grange's oaths were together gross and sophisticated.

So she drifted again closer to Lizzie, who unveiled to her a life so extraordinarily like her own, dreams of the stoker, desires for sixpences to buy peppermints and seats at the picture palace. And a greater depth too, for Lizzie had been in trouble four years before, and she wept abundantly every year on the fifth of April, which was the date of the baby's birth and death. It was very wrong, Sue thought, but still life was hard, and people did these things. She had been educated, and she had survived. But still her education bade her not to throw herself too easily into the arms of the class below or of

the class upon the edge. It would not do, she thought, and she was still loyal enough to Roger to think it was not fair to him. That was the end of love: she was doing what he wanted no longer because it pleased him, but because it was only fair.

One night, when Roger had disappeared to play bridge somewhere, she could no longer sit in the lounge reading *The Illustrated London News* or obscure jokes in *Punch* until it was time to go to bed. The end of August had come, and the equinoctial gales were preparing. She could hear a high wind flinging what sounded like solid water against the glass roof of the winter garden. It tempted her. It was violent outside, not like this lounge full of discreet conversation and the smoke of good tobacco. She ran up to her room, not knowing what she wanted, not knowing that it was just a sensation of freedom she wanted. She did not even change her shoes but just threw over her evening frock her tweed travelling coat.

Head down to the driving wind and rain that in an instant soaked her hair, flung little streams down her neck into her breast, she wandered through the town. It was ill-lit. She went for a long time along the front, for a very long time to the outskirts of Margate, thinking of nothing, feeling only a relief in fighting the heavy north wind. One could touch that wind. That wind was not like the impalpable difficulties amid which she floundered. Sometimes she stopped to thrust back the soaked wisps of hair that stuck to her face. She was tired. She stood in a little street for a very long time, staring at a mysterious inscription outside a church:

ADDOLDY
Y WESLEYAID CYMREIG
TREFN Y MODDION

She did not even wonder what it was. Vaguely she thought it must be something to do with smart society,

so no wonder she did not understand it. She went back to Broadstairs very fast, for the wind blew at her back now, carrying her on. It was a violent night, and yet the sea had no waves. It rose and fell in the vast curves of a heavy ground swell. It was like the breathing of some large beast turning uneasily in stertorous sleep. She felt alone, and she stopped a while to listen to the sea that breathed mouth to mouth with the sweeping wind.

III

They returned to town, Roger full of determinations. His marriage was not a marriage: still, there were lots of unions like that. He must make the best of his life, make it up of other things. He went back to the Settlement as that was the obvious thing to do, and for a few days his work interested him; to see Platt, and Ford, and Churton again after two months was agreeable; they were renewed. He grew quite enthusiastic over the redecoration of the lecture room and had long interviews with Forncett. But still he was conscious of a peculiar atmosphere around him; he was still notable. He enjoyed an incomprehensible popularity among the patrons of the Settlement. Then he forgot; he was getting used to it. But one afternoon he left the Settlement just in time to meet the small boys as they came out of Clare Street schools. For a moment he stood watching a little group that eyed him smiling. They were nice kids, he thought, and it might be worth while making life brighter for them. He gave them a paternal nod and walked on.

He did not want to pass Paradise Row, so he turned up the High Street. It was rather crowded and yet, after a moment, when he had crossed the street, he found that he was followed. Five little boys, a silent and smiling group, walked about six yards behind him. He stared at them, and they returned the stare with ap-

parently vivid interest. Uncertain what to do, he walked on, and still they followed him into the High Street. They were singing something, but he could not hear it on account of the trams. A minute or two later he turned: really this was too irritating. "Go away!" he cried. The five little boys smiled at him with deep relish.

He could not brawl with five little boys in the St. Panwich High Street, could he? So he walked on still faster, trying as he went to catch the burden of their song. On reaching Northbourne Road he turned suddenly to the right, hoping to discourage them. But it was no use; still they followed him as there were no trams here; at last, as he passed the town hall with his procession behind him, he heard their song:

"That's the man
That is 'im.
Everybody says
We want more like 'IM."

For a moment as he walked on he was puzzled. These beastly little boys were just annoying him. He thought he had better go round by the gas works and then get into Crapp's Lane. He could run for a tram; they wouldn't follow him on a tram. And still the song went on with no further variation:

"That's the man
That is 'im.
Everybody says
We want more like 'IM."

Suddenly he remembered: of course, the Labour member's phrase! The man like whom we want more! He walked so fast that he nearly ran; his cheeks were burning. He rushed along Crapp's Lane, dodged in and out between barrows, wildly apologising to an old woman whom he caused to drop her string bag. And

as at last, ashamed and despairing, the five little boys running hard upon his heels, he at last managed to get on to the Euston tram, the two last lines followed him:

". . . Everybody says
We want more like 'IM."

It was purely instinctive. At Euston he took a taxi and went straight to St. Mary's Mansions with only two thoughts in his mind: St. Panwich was impossible, and would Theresa be at home? She was not. Elizabeth was sympathetic. She liked the one whom she had once looked upon as Miss Theresa's young man, though she much resented his not having married her. She made him tea, as he decided to wait for Theresa. She even stood and talked to him, tortured him with questions. Notably she wanted to be informed whether the new Maida Vale Station of the Bakerloo would get her to Bourne and Hollingsworth quicker than the Number 8 bus. He said "Yes" and "No" where required and sat there moodily smoking cigarette after cigarette. Would Theresa never come? He wanted her, he wanted her very badly; he was like a wounded man who thinks only of the time when the nurse will come and change his dressing.

When at last Theresa came she seemed to know at once. It was as if they were linked by a secret intimacy. He told her in a few words and then looked at her rather angrily, for Theresa threw herself back in the armchair and uncontrollably laughed. "Oh," she gasped, "this is the man, this is 'Im . . ." She pointed at him. "Oh, Roger, Roger, it's too funny."

"You always seem to see something funny in everything," said Huncote savagely.

"Well, there is," said Theresa. "Everybody says . . . Oh, dear! oh, dear! and you don't know how funny you look, Roger."

He jumped up. "Oh, well, if you feel like that about it, I may as well go."

But she too leapt to her feet and took his arm.

"Dear," she said, "I'm so sorry, I didn't want to hurt your feelings, but do let your sense of humour have a chance." He did not reply. "But never mind the funny part of it," she said, "I know it's hard on you." Half-unconsciously she pressed the arm she held against her breast. He felt consoled by her nearness.

"I can't go on with the Settlement," he said, more calmly.

Theresa hesitated. "Well, perhaps you can't, not you, you know. Somebody with a thicker skin perhaps." She glanced at him from under her lashes and thought how she loved him for his absurd delicacy, for the fastidious quixotism which had led him into such misery, but might yet lead him to delights more subtle than could be given any other man. "But what else can you do? You must do something."

"Yes," said Roger, "I s'pose I must. I'd better do some real work, I think."

Theresa looked interested: few things are so thrilling as the life work of the man one loves.

"I'm a bit old for the Civil Service," he said, "and besides it isn't very exciting, is it? Or I might read for the Bar."

Theresa shook her head: "Oh, no, not the law. If you want to do any good there you've got to be like a two-edged sword,—one edge to shear the plaintiff with and the other to shear the defendant."

He smiled and that made her heart leap, for it was she had made him smile.

"I s'pose I'll have to take to literature," he said, "that's what everybody does when he isn't any good for anything else." He smiled bitterly. "After all, I'm qualified to write a novel; I can tell the story of my three years at Oxford."

She did not respond: literature — yes, that was fascinating, but what if he failed? It would be so horrible to see him fail. The man she loved could not be allowed to fail.

"Must you do anything?" she said. "You're young, you've money of your own, you'll have more; can't you live agreeably, just like that, doing what you like and not doing anything in particular,—until one day you get an impulse? It might be anything, it might be literature, as you say, or politics, or travel. You're very young, you see."

It hurt her just then to feel three years older, perhaps too old. He shook his head.

"Oh, no," he said. "If I'd anybody to help me, somebody like you — But, oh, no, my life's wrong."

She came closer, and half-consciously he tried to put his arms about her shoulders. She drew back.

"No, Roger," she whispered, "please don't. I haven't said anything about it, but I haven't forgotten. It was wrong, what we did at Grove Ferry." He did not move his arm. "Please let me go, Roger; you shouldn't have kissed me. I shouldn't have let you rather; it was my fault."

His arm dropped. "Oh, all right," he said. The flat weakness in his voice hurt her abominably. "I'm no good," he went on. "What's the use of talking about work to me? I was spoilt by having money just as others are spoilt by not having any. Leave me alone. Others have suffered, and others have known how to live; so can I."

He looked away, and she felt in torture that he might be looking away because his eyes were full of tears, and he, manlike, would not let her see.

It was she then, not knowing whether in love or in pity, seized him by the shoulders and drew his head down, and she who kissed him again and again, who drew him close, who hid his face within her arms. She

was not thinking now, but only feeling that this was her man, that he was unhappy, and that she must not let it be.

IV

Opulent September had gone and October too, in her robe of red and gold leaf, like a woman no longer young who is still beautiful, yet not for long and knows it, and smiles a little sadly in her rich garment. Then passed November that is like a long weeping maiden in a fingent robe of modest mist. And December was waning, active and fierce, brightly cold, somehow gay as if the year were dancing its dance of death. It would be Christmas soon.

Sue was almost used to being unhappy. In the last three months life had become again desperately like what it was before they went away. People had come to them and had returned their hospitality. She had met Theresa once or twice, but evidently Theresa did not like coming to Pembroke Square; she was innocent but she felt guilty. To console Roger in his unhappiness was a little like taking him away from the wife whose business it was to console him. Theresa knew that Sue could not console him, but still it felt disloyal. Nor did Sue make things easy for her. Since she discovered that her husband had gone to Grove Ferry secretly she had hated the interloper; she had suspected other meetings, many meetings, and much more than there was in them. It was a demonstration of her new state that there were no scenes of jealousy; Sue was too numb to be angry now. Generally she felt: "Let her have him if she wants him; I don't." There were moments of rebellion when she told herself: "He's mine." But that was just pride and passed away when Roger sat in front of her in the evening, reading *The English Review* or the bound volume of *Rhythm*, incomprehensible things. They had had only one scene, in

October, when Sue hinted that Roger might take her away for a fortnight to Biarritz, just like the other time, to celebrate the first anniversary of their wedding. He was moved for a second, then he said:

"Oh, I see. You want to make an annual pilgrimage of it?"

"Yes, we might go every year. It'd be nice, wouldn't it?"

"Let's go a little later, October's so nice here; you'll be glad to get down south in January or February."

Sue hesitated. "Oh, it wouldn't be the same thing. We ought to go the very same day."

He was irritated. "Oh, don't be so sentimental. What's the same day got to do with it?"

"I see the day doesn't mean much to you," said Sue stonily.

"Doesn't . . . Oh, but what is a date? Just because we happened to be married in October you want to consecrate October. One might think you'd got married for the sake of a honeymoon and a white silk dress, and flowers, and all that sort of rot."

"I don't think it rot," said Sue, "but anyhow that's not a very nice word, Roger."

When she said that he understood why the villain at Drury Lane occasionally grinds his teeth. So this was education.

"Don't be silly," he said. "And above all don't be sentimental; I'm not that sort of man."

She looked at him with brilliant eyes.

"No, you aren't that sort of man, I know. Wish I'd known it. Wish I'd known more about men. That's what comes of keeping straight."

He looked at her, more unhappy than angry. So this was what he was doing for her, making her cynical! It softened him too, but as if she felt the softness she grew angrier.

"I didn't expect much of men. Ma — my mother

told me. Still one wants a real man. He may lift his elbow a bit and all that, but anyhow's he's a man, the other sort. Not a dummy in a glass case all over labels."

"Are you talking about me?" said Roger.

"I'm talking about nobody." She turned away; she looked dark and sulky with a forward pout of the lips.

He said: "It's quite clear you don't care for me any more."

"Well, do you?" asked Sue, evading his question.

"Of course I do."

"Looks like it."

"Sue," he said, "you're making me unhappy."

She nearly melted, she nearly jumped up to throw her arms round his neck, but she had her proper pride, so she did not move. That bond which should have been so beautiful was broken. He was unhappy, and she sat cold as Anaxarete.

On a December afternoon, as she climbed the stairs to Mrs. Groby's tenement, she remembered that quarrel. She had not said anything about it at the time, being too proud. Mrs. Groby did not at first show curiosity; she had complaints to make about Mr. Groby.

"Spends too much time at the club. Tell yer wot, it didn't do us much good, 'avin' that money for Muriel. Yer father stopped some of it every week. It all goes t' the same place, an' 'e's gettin' 'ard to manage when 'e's twopence. Corsts money too," she added reflectively. "The other day I arsked 'im ter put a bit by for a rainy day. Waste not, want not, I said. And 'e said 'e'd put it across me, 'e did."

Sue showed dutiful interest in her father's behaviour, in Muriel who, it appeared, had designs on the Junior Cambridge Local, with Matric in the dizzy distance. Perce, it seemed, was getting on; the most junior clerk having gone, he had been promoted and now showed a red half-circle under his chin as his collars had risen

with his salary. But Sue was unresponsive, and at last Mrs. Groby noticed it.

"Wot's the matter with you sittin' there like —" Mrs. Groby's cockney failed her and the ancient Sussex strain came out — "like a painted lady."

"I don't know."

"'Ad a rumpus with yer ole man?" Sue did not reply. "I can see yer 'ave. Well, well, one 'as one's ups an' downs. Shure it ain't *your* fault?"

"You always think it's my fault, Mother."

"Didn't say it was."

"Yes, you did; you never stick up for me as you do for Perce."

"Perce's only a kid," said Mrs. Groby defensively.

She felt guilty and would not have liked to be told that a mother will defend her son better than her daughter. She wanted to know what had happened, but she found it difficult to get it out of Sue. Her daughter could only hint vaguely at a continual coldness, at an estrangement.

"We don't see each other much," she said.

Mrs. Groby thought for a while.

"Well, this is a nice 'ow-d'yer-do. Married people didn't be'ave like that in my time, an' yer can't even say wot's wrong."

"Everything," said Sue.

"That's the same as nothing," said Mrs. Groby.

"Yer discontented, yer spoilt, that's wot yer are. Yer ain't got 'nuff to do. If yer 'ad a little 'un in th' nursery an' another on th' way, yer wouldn't talk. Tell yer wot, I don't know 'ow yer maniges it in th' upper ten. Them fine ladies, they don't seem t'ave children like us."

"P'raps they don't want to," said Sue.

Mrs. Groby meditated this remark. She had heard about that sort of thing, but did not think she ought to discuss the topic with Sue. Sue was married, but was still her little girl, so she cruelly remarked:

"P'raps. It's a queer world, but one lives an' learns." Again she became personal. "But all that's got nothin' t' do with it. Yer ort t'ave one, an' I'll tell yer for why. It would give yer somethin' t' do instead o' wanderin' about, lookin' like a ghost. Yer married, so wot yer want is a couple o' kiddies t' take yer mind orf it."

Sue thought over this: yes, one did want something to take one's mind off marriage. But she said nothing, and Mrs. Groby went on: "Besides, it's always been like that. Yer got to 'ave children. It's in the Bible. I'll find it for yer."

Mrs. Groby brought down the Bible which had been given her when she was a little girl by Great-aunt Elizabeth, and made a lengthy search. She had a vague idea that it might be in Leviticus. But it was not. Nor was it in the Song of Solomon. At last she left the Bible open and went to the marriage service in the prayer book. She was not sure, but she felt there ought to be something about children in that. While her mother struggled with the difficult language, Sue idly turned over the leaves of the Bible. She hardly knew what she read; she thought merely that she was unhappy. She turned over the flyleaf where her mother had written a few days after her wedding a curious little statement:

"Edith is my name,
Groby is my surname,
St. Panwich is my dwelling-place
And Christ is my salvation.

When I am dead and in my grave
And all my bones are rotten,
If you will glance inside this book
Then I am not forgotten."

Sue read it over twice. For the first time in her life that sort of idea meant something to her. Yes, she too

would be dead one day. It was not only other people died; it was even people like her, people with warm blood running through them. She did not shrink. What did it matter? she thought. What would it matter in a hundred years? This idiotic idea comforted her a little.

Mrs. Groby had at last found what she wanted in the marriage service and triumphantly read it. Sue did not reply; she did not want a child, and thought it fortunate there should not be one. She did not know why, but she vaguely felt that it would tie her up for good, and it would be terrible to think that a life such as hers could be anything but temporary. She could not bear that life any more. Even from afar it was impossible. She could not bear to go back at once to the stifling place.

So for a long time she wandered in St. Panwich, chilled by the coming darkness. She did not mind, she did not cling to the High Street where the well-lit windows of Bubwith and of Davis combined with the trams to produce a sort of gaiety. Unconsciously she began a sentimental journey. She turned through Paradise Square into Clare Street, passing the schools where she had been educated. She remembered how Ada Nuttall had got into trouble for not knowing what counties surrounded London. She smiled as she repeated: "Surrey, Kent, Sussex, Middlesex . . ."

She passed a sweet-shop where every now and then she had bought halfpennyworths of toffee when she had that rare halfpenny. She thought of those children, now men and women, lost in London as was she. She remembered a few names: Alberta, and "Pudding", and Jackie Brown. They had not been unhappy. On Saturday afternoons they had gone for picnics with some bread, perhaps a little jam, and a bottle of water to Highgate Fields. As she walked she remembered earlier picnics still, when she and the others were too

small to walk so far, and they had settled for the afternoon in the waste land between the gas works and the power station. They had not been unhappy there; the boys played cricket with a wicket made of coats, and Jackie Brown cut his knee upon a sardine tin; they bound it up with handkerchiefs, and he walked up and down the High Street, saying he was a cajerlty in the Bore War.

She avoided the Settlement and wandered up Crapp's Lane. Without thinking she turned to the left into the square between Crapp's Lane and Northbourne Road. It was an open square, and she went in. There was nobody there; it was grey, and dark, and lifeless. The hollybush and the evergreens shone black with soot. But the square thrilled her, for round the base of the biggest tree was a bench. She had sat there once or twice with Bert. Ah! There it was, just the same. The bench was furrowed with age and rain and stank with rottenness, but that did not matter. She remained standing before it, kid-gloved hands clasped over the gold top of her umbrella. She remembered that they had scratched their initials upon the bench with a pin, and wondered whether they were still there. It was not yet so dark that one could not see, and for some time she searched. There were plenty of initials on that bench, and arrows, and hearts. But it had rained a great deal since then, and S.G. and B.C. were not scratched very deep. She remembered that Bert had not his knife that day, so they had used a pin. Pins did not scratch very deep; perhaps other people had cut their initials over theirs, blotted them out. Anyhow, the initials were gone like everything else. She sat for a long time on the mouldy bench, conscious of the growing coldness of the world and of evening time. She was twenty, she was old. Everything that had been was washed out or rubbed away. Even Bert — well, she only had herself to blame. Slowly she melted to the memory of him, and

she remembered many little things: Saturday afternoons at Hampton Court when he sculled and looked so nice with his hair ruffled, though he did not believe it and begged her not to spoil his parting. And the day when he told her that he loved her, behind the gasometer. And a garnet and opal ring which she shyly left at home when she married.

It all seemed so wonderful and tender, so real in the familiar streets, the very streets in which she and Bert used to do their courting. She did not know what made her do it, but she found herself walking along Northbourne Road back to Crapp's Lane, past the gas works and then quickly along John Street towards the mews, as if she were again keeping a tryst. It was darker now, close on to six o'clock; Bert would come out in a minute or two. She stood in the silent mews. It hurt her to find them silent: in that short year motorcars had come, and the cab horses had gone. Her mind was filled with a romantic idea: there she was at the old place, almost waiting for him. Supposing he too were to come into the mews for old sake's sake? They would meet. It would be as if Providence,—then she blamed herself, told herself not to be silly, and yet remained waiting. For you never knew. The men came out, first one by one, then in groups and a whole crowd. Posted at the corner of the mews, she watched, and she did not know why she watched. Then her heart grew large and her limbs a little numb. Here he came with another man. They did not see her but walked away towards Crapp's Lane, and without knowing why, she followed. She knew he was going home. She knew his mate would leave him at the corner. She thought herself absurd and accepted the absurdity. She thought: "Supposing he turned round, what should I say?" So much did this shake her that she suddenly stopped, let him get out of sight.

At once she felt alone, and yet she could not go home.

She thought she would go back to her mother's for supper after telegraphing to Roger. Yes, she could not so suddenly leave the real old life for the new one.

There were a good many people at the post-office in the High Street, and she had to wait for some time at the telegraph counter. This irritated her: to send that telegram would make her vaguely feel quit for a while of the new life. At last it was done. As she stuck on the stamps she grew conscious of a familiar voice: "Penny stamp, Miss."

Nothing had been said; they were out in the street, and for a long time they walked side by side, he a little in front and she following, as it had been. As if by agreement, they turned off at Crapp's Lane: they did not want to pass the Settlement. At last they spoke.

"Pretty cold," said Bert.

"Yes," said Sue humbly.

"I should say we'll have some snow."

"Seen mother lately?" said Sue, changing the subject.

He did not reply, and they said nothing until they passed John Street. Sue was thrilled because he had not turned off where he should to go home. She did not know whether she wanted him to turn off or not. She did not know what she wanted. She just followed him, and he let her without knowing that he wanted to. It was simply that they had both of them been plucked by chance out of the new life, planted into the old and that already, quite simply, the roots were setting. So their little talk was irrelevant. She said:

"One's not always happy."

He stared at her, and for a moment the charm was broken as he said:

"Don't see what you've got to complain about; you're married, and all that."

"Oh, married," said Sue bitterly. "It depends who you're married to."

"Well, you know, I never thought much of marriage. It's only a social contract. It's a dodge invented by the priests to get hold of all the silly fools. That's all it is. So, of course, the capitalist state got hold of it, capitalists always were in with the priests. Still, I don't say — it's handy in a way."

She did not protest. Bert had always shocked her by not respecting marriage, by looking upon it as merely a social convenience. It was nice somehow to hear him talk as he used to even though it did sound silly. For one moment she thought of marriage, and wondered whether she were doing wrong to be with him like that. She sighed, for she could not find the answer. She blamed herself, and yet her morality was still unchanged, still instinctive, still tolerant of the irregular, for life was very hard, and there you were.

"I see you don't agree with me," said Bert. "Wooden-headed as ever." She did not reply. "You don't want to talk to me, do you?"

Still no reply. He stopped.

"Look here, I don't know what we're doing. May as well say good night."

She put out her hand as if to touch him and remembered just in time that these public touchings belonged to a class she had left.

"Don't talk like that, Bert," she said. "You know quite well."

"Oh, do I?" said Bert. "That's just what I don't know. There you are, living in your fine house, with servants and motorcars. You're not what you used to be. I don't mind." He corrected himself. "I mean I shouldn't mind so much if it made you happy. But I don't think."

They walked silently by each other's side again. St. Panwich was left behind, and they were nearing Highbury. He was racked, for he felt her unhappiness. He wanted to say something to comfort her, yet knew that

if he spoke he would be harsh. And she wanted so much to answer that she was unhappy. They went for a very long time along the dark streets, looking away from each other. There were tears in her eyes now, though forming gradually. First there was a tingling, then a sense of matted eyelashes, of a film over her eyeballs, and then suddenly she could not see at all. Her eyes were filled with water, and something in her throat that she could not control rose and fell. She stopped just as they were passing over Hertford bridge, clutched the parapet, her other hand upon her breast.

"Well," said Bert, "what's up now? What have you got to complain about after all, with your servants and your fine clothes?" He grew bitter as the envy in him mixed with his desire. In this minute he hated her because he loved her, and somehow she had removed herself from him. "With your fine clothes," he snarled. "No wonder you don't want to talk to the likes of me now you've become a bloody lady."

Sue gave a little gasp, and her hand, groping through the darkness that lay over her eyes, found his arm, convulsively gripped it.

"Bert," she said gently, "don't say that; it isn't true. I'm not a lady, you know that, really I'm not. Oh, Bert, Bert, I ain't."

And as if the sudden relapse into her original tongue had loosed in her something that had been suffering, beating its wings against golden bars, and she found herself in Bert's arms, not crying bitterly now, but like a child, not even wondering if her hair were growing untidy, or her nose red. She just clung to him, shaking all over, as if the whole of her were melting into tears.

"Cheer up, you silly kid," said Bert, moved and angry because his voice was husky. "Making such a show of yourself, I'm surprised at you. Chuck it, I say."

He could not bear to see her cry but would not tell her so. And then, as if love told him exactly what to do, he drew her closer into his arms and gave her upon the lips a good heavy kiss which was that of a brother more than of a lover.

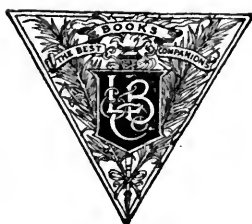
V

Roger stood in the hall. He had not come home to dinner, and it was ten o'clock. He had read the telegram, and now he read over and over again a note from Sue which had just come by a messenger:

"I'm going away to Bert. I'm not coming back. Never."

So it was over. Queer! He was neither shocked nor unhappy, only dull. Yes, it was all over. He should have expected it. What should he do? One thought only formed in his brain: Theresa. He would go to Theresa. His mind took a more practical turn. How hateful it all was. He would have to divorce Sue. Well, it was only fair. He must set her free; he had spoilt enough of her life. He felt moved as he half-understood how much she must have suffered before doing this, breaking all her own rules of faithfulness. He pitied her so much that he almost loved her again. But that was over. And there formed in him a sense of lightness. Poor Sue, she was free. And he? Well, he was going to Theresa.

As he put on his coat he saw that something else lay upon the hall table. He picked it up. It was a picture postcard from Perce: the bachelor in lodgings, holding up to his landlady a dead rat which he has just fished out of the soup tureen. Underneath were the words: "I said vegetable soup, not Irish stew."





By the Author of "*The Stranger's Wedding*"

THE SECOND BLOOMING

By W. L. GEORGE

12 mo. 438 pages. \$1.35 net

A strong and thoughtful story. — *New York World*.

A story of amazing power and insight. — *Washington Evening Star*.

Mr. George is one of the Englishmen to be reckoned with. One now says Wells, Galsworthy, Bennett — and W. L. George. — *New York Globe*.

This writer has entered with more courage and intensity into the inner sanctuaries of life than Mr. Howells and Mr. Bennett have cared to do. — *Chicago Tribune*.

Mr. George follows a vein of literary brilliancy that is all his own, and his study of feminine maturity will find ample vindication the round world over. — *Philadelphia North American*.

It is a book which is bound to appeal to women, for it is so extraordinarily true to life; so many women have passed and are passing through remarkably similar experiences. — *London Evening Standard*.

It is perhaps the biggest piece of fiction that the present season has known. The present reviewer may frankly say, without exaggeration, that he has not had a treat of similar order since the still memorable day when he first made the acquaintance of Mr. Galsworthy's "*Man of Property*." — *Frederic T. Cooper in the Bookman* (N. Y.).

LITTLE, BROWN & CO., PUBLISHERS

34 BEACON STREET, BOSTON

The Racial Characteristics of French and English.

THE MAKING OF AN ENGLISHMAN

By W. L. GEORGE

12 mo. Cloth. \$1.35 net.

Not since Thackeray, indeed, has any English novelist done a more impressive study of the typical Englishman. It is not only a good story; it is a notable study of national character. — *Baltimore Sun*.

Not merely a splendid opportunity for contrast between the temperamental differences of French and English, but a narrative of earnest merit. We are met by a full world of English characters. — *New York Post*.

First and last, interesting. It is crowded with impressions, glimpses, and opinions. There are many characters and they are all living. . . . Reading his book is a real adventure, by no means to be missed. — *New York Times*.

A vigorous novel based upon the process — constructive and destructive — whereby a typical French youth, mercurial, passionate, spectacular, is transformed into a staid and stolid English householder and husband. — *Chicago Herald*.

Mr. George, one of the most promising of the younger English writers, has shown the process of naturalization from a more striking viewpoint, in this story of the changing of a Frenchman into an English citizen. With this purpose and his nervous, irritable nature trouble is sure to ensue, and he has adventures in plenty. — *Boston Transcript*.

LITTLE, BROWN & CO., PUBLISHERS

34 BEACON STREET, BOSTON

"Once read, will not quickly be forgotten." — *Providence Journal*.

UNTIL THE DAY BREAK

By W. L. GEORGE

12 mo. Cloth. \$1.35 net.

Mr. George's study of the evolution of this Israel Kalisch is a remarkable work in realistic fiction. — *New York World*.

A novel of more than usual value. . . . It is a life-drama, such as is going on continually in London and New York. — *Hearst's Magazine*.

The story contains a very pretty love element . . . Such an objective picture as is here presented will do more than sermons to reveal the futility of the sacrifice which anarchy sometimes makes of noble minds. — *New York Post*.

Mr. George unquestionably has the gift of description, not only of places but of men. Kalisch, egotistic, self-confident, fearless, making his way from Gallicia through Hungary to starve and fight in New York, is an impressive conception. — *The Bookman*.

Israel, Warsch, Leimeritz, the various women who successively love Israel, they are so true, so vital that we can almost see and hear them speak and breathe. Yes, this is a great novel, even though it alternately fires and freezes the very marrow of the soul. — *Chicago Herald*.

LITTLE, BROWN & CO., PUBLISHERS

34 BEACON STREET, BOSTON



